The Marker Lamp

Volume 71 • Number 4 • December 2025

Photo-Laminate Structures

Plus:

Connections 2026

A Handy Paint Handle

Roadbed and Trackwork for Your Railroad

Early Conventions in Central Texas

LONE STAR REGION
NATIONAL MODEL RAILROAD ASSOCIATION

LSR CONVENTION
2026
CONNECTIONS
AUSTIN, TEXAS

NMRA

The Marker Lamp

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Address all correspondence, news, photos and drawings to the editor. All material will be gladly accepted and will be used depending on the availability of space and suitability of material. None will be returned unless a stamped, self-addressed envelope is provided. Correspondence relating to advertising should be addressed to Steve Sandifer at steve.sandifer@sbcglobal.net.

Cover photos are from Brian Helms' HO Scale Dallas & Western Railroad featured at Connections 2026. (Photos by Peter Kazmir)

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President's Corner

Happy Holidays

by Bob Barnett, MMR
rbarnettmopac@gmail.com

I was up against the deadline for the President's Message so I began writing this on Thursday November 27, 2025 (aka Thanksgiving Day). That was appropriate as it occurs to me that the hobby of model railroading is one of the many things I am thankful for.

But its not just the trains, models, layouts etc. It is the many friendships that have developed over the last 50 years. The longer one is in the hobby the, more you realize that many of your closest friends are the folks you travel to conventions and train shows with; work with on conventions, shows or layout construction; operate on their layouts or work with in the contest room.

A common interest has a way of bringing people together from vastly different economic and social backgrounds, different religions and different political beliefs to work on projects of common interest and promote "the cause", in this case model railroading. So, I hope you had a very happy Thanksgiving and I wish you a joyous Christmas Holiday and Season.

One of the reasons I was late in writing this message is I was preparing an article on the "Central Texas" LSR Conventions, seen elsewhere in this issue of the Marker Lamp. Central Texas modelers, now LSR Division 4, have a long history of producing LSR Conventions. From three Waco based conventions in the early days of the LSR to five Austin-Round Rock based conventions and one just up the road in Temple, numerous successful conventions have been held since 1952.

This "center-of-the-state" location is the perfect place to draw a crowd. IH 35 connects four of the top five population centers in Texas with the largest single population center being a mere 165 miles to the southeast. (Remember 165 miles constitutes a close neighbor in Texas.) Don't worry, Doug Taylor and Peter, I am not suggesting that Division 4 become the permanent location for future LSR conventions, but you do hold a key advantage on location. So, if you are reading this, chances are good you are under a three-hour drive from the convention.

We are looking forward to the Connections 2026 LSR Convention in Austin and hope to see you all there. **ML**

From the Editor

Momentum

by Peter Kazmir
peter@centexnmra.org

One of the things that strikes me most as I look over this issue is the sense of momentum across the Lone Star Region. Model railroading is often thought of as a solitary hobby, but when you step back and look at what's happening around us, it's clear that a great deal of activity is being driven by people coming together to share ideas, skills, and enthusiasm.

In this issue alone, you'll find articles that dig into the nuts and bolts of the model railroading—building photo laminate structures, a great hack for holding models while you paint, and another fantastic Getting Started column by Cliff—this time with practical guidance on building reliable trackwork. These are the kinds of skills that many of us have developed over years, and they reflect a willingness to learn, experiment, and keep improving.

At the same time, there's a lot happening beyond the pages of *The Marker Lamp*. So many clinics are being hosted across the Region, and Divisions are seeing strong attendance and lively discussion. Train shows continue to draw crowds, offering a chance to connect with the public and with each other. New forms of outreach and education also are contributing to a steady rhythm of activity that keeps the Region moving forward.

That same sense of momentum is evident in the planning for the 2026 LSR Convention. Long before the first clinic begins or the first layout tour opens its doors, there's already a tremendous amount of energy behind the scenes. That effort reflects a broader truth about our Region: things don't just "happen." They happen because members step up, share their time, and say yes to being involved.

Momentum doesn't require everyone to do everything. Sometimes it's presenting a clinic, sometimes it's attending one. Sometimes it's building a new model, hosting a layout visit, or simply showing up to a meeting. Each small contribution adds to something larger.

As you read through this issue, I hope you'll see that momentum—and maybe feel encouraged to be part of it, in whatever way makes sense for you.

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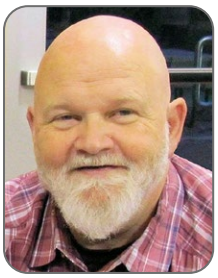
Read more about the 2026 LSR Convention in this issue. It will be held in Austin next summer, and registration is now open at connections2026.com. I hope to see you there!

Until then, keep the fun in model railroading! **ML**



Events Calendar

by Bill Dryden
bdr149@airmail.net

Here are upcoming events within the LSR of which I am aware. I will provide all the information YOU send me or I can glean from other publications, websites, etc., for these events. Additional information may be available through the *NMRA Magazine* and/or other magazines or websites. Also, note that all show times and dates are as I have found them; all are at the discretion of the sponsoring organization and are subject to change. Please forward any and all information about upcoming events or activities in your area, club, etc., to me, via e-mail at bdr149@airmail.net.

Connections 2026

Lone Star Region NMRA Convention

June 18-21, 2026

Wyndham Garden Inn
3401 South IH-35
Austin, TX 78741

Connections2026.com

Check the website for additional information as plans for the convention continue to develop.

Register Today!

Events and Shows

January 2026

3 - Pearland, Texas (Houston)
Houston Area Lone Star Division Meet, sponsored by the Lone Star Division of the TCA. 10:30 am - 4 pm. Adults $10 per person, $15 per family, under 12 free. Knights of Columbus, 2320 Hatfield Rd., Pearland, TX. More info: https://trainshows.net/event/1490/houston-area-lone-star-division-meet

17-18 - Plano, Texas (Dallas)
Winter Plano Train Show, sponsored by the North Texas Council of Railroad Clubs. Saturday 10 am - 5 pm, Sunday 10 am - 4 pm. Adults $11, children 12 and under free; $1 discount is given for cash. Plano Event Center, 2000 E. Spring Creek Parkway, Plano, TX. More info: https://www.dfwtrainshows.com/

February

21 - Pasadena, Texas (Houston)
Greater Houston Train Show, sponsored by the San Jacinto Model Railroad Club. 10 am - 4pm. Adults $10, youth $5 (maximum $15 per household, $1 discount is given for cash). Cash and credit cards accepted at the door. 7902 Fairmont Parkway, Pasadena, TX. More info: https://sanjacmodeltrains.org/GHTS.php

21-22 - Garden Ridge, Texas (San Antonio)
50th Annual Model Railroad Jamboree, sponsored by the San Antonio Model Railroad Association. Saturday 9 am - 4 pm, Sunday 10 am - 4 pm. Adults $10, 14 and under free (limit 3). Wounded Warrior and active duty military (and immediate family) free w/valid ID. Garden Ridge Community and Events Center, 9500 Municipal Pkwy, Garden Ridge, TX. For more information: https://samratx.org/train%20show.html

March

14-15 - Grapevine, Texas (Fort Worth)
Train-a-Palooza, sponsored by he Lone Star Hi-Railers Model Railroad Association. Saturday, 10 am - 5 pm, Sunday 10 am - 3 pm. Adults $10, children 12 and under (and Scouts/leaders in uniform) free. Admission good both days. Grapevine Convention Center, 1209 S. Main Street, Grapevine, TX. More info: https://lonestarhirailers.com/train-a-palooza-tm

28-29 - Dallas, Texas
Great Train Show. Saturday and Sunday 10 am - 4 pm. Dallas Market Hall, 2200 N. Stemmons Fwy, Dallas, TX. More info: https://www.greattrainshow.com/

April

25-26 - Texas City, Texas (Galveston)
Railfest, sponsored by the Galveston Railroad Museum. Saturday and Sunday 10 am - 5 pm. Museum members $10, adults $15, seniors $12, under 14 $12, 2 and under free. Active Miltary Free. Admission to museum and Galveston County Model Railroad Club layout included with entry. Texas City Museum, 409 6th Street, Texas City, TX. More information: https://galvestonrrmuseum.org/railfest/

Recurring Events and Meetings

LSR Cowcatcher Division 1 - Fort Worth, TX
The Cowcatcher Division meets on the 2nd Saturday of each month at the Texas Western Model Railroad Club, 6808 Forest Hills Drive, Forest Hills, TX. You can attend in person or via Zoom. For more information regarding the Cowcatcher Division or its programs, check their website: https://www.cowcatcherdivision.org.

LSR Bayou Division 2 - Baton Rouge/New Orleans, LA
The Bayou Division meets quarterly at different locations. For information on future meetings contact Rod Fredericks at fredericks.rod@gmail.com.

LSR Trinity Division 3 - Allen, TX
The Trinity River Division meets at 10:00 am on the 3rd Saturday of every month at the Christ Servant Lutheran Church, Allen Texas. Occasionally things change due to scheduling conflicts so pay close attention to the email meeting notices that go out a week before the meeting. If you would like to be added to the email list contact Robert Secrest at Robert.Secrest@hotmail.com.

LSR Cen-Tex Division 4 - Austin, TX
The Cen-Tex Division meets bi-monthly at the Austin Northwest Recreational Center, 2913 Northland Drive, Austin, TX. Meetings are held at 10:00 am on the 2nd Saturday of the odd months and include clinics, show-and-tell, DCC minute, social activities and a layout open house. For more information about upcoming meetings, see https://centexnmra.org or contact director@centexnmra.org to be added to the mail list.

LSR West Texas Division 5
Division 5 holds their meetings virtually on Zoom on the 3rd Monday of each month starting at 7:00 pm. Anyone that can join via Zoom is welcome to attend. Use this link to sign up for the division's monthly bulletin and keep up with events and happenings in the division: http://eepurl.com/hRLLm9 or email Headroadie2004@gmail.com.

LSR South Texas Division 6 - San Antonio, TX
The South Texas Division meets bi-monthly at the Longhorn Cafe at 12311 Nacogdoches Road in San Antonio. Meetings are held at 11:00 am on the 2nd Saturday of even months. Please come out and join us for clinics, show-and-tell, tip and tricks, and the ever-popular Deal-or-Duds, along with great fellowship and often a visit to a local home layout. For more information contact Roy Kaiser, Division Director, at fr8train@gvtc.com.

LSR Texas Gulf Division 8 - Houston, TX
The Texas Gulf Division meets in conjunction with the San Jacinto Model Railroad Club on the 1st Tuesday of each month at the Southwest Central Church of Christ, 4011 W. Bellfort Avenue, Houston, TX. The meeting starts promptly at 7 pm. We will have a clinic and a business meeting. Refreshments will be served. For more information contact Phil Stewart at pstewart1225@yahoo.com.

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Alamo Model Railroad Engineers - San Antonio, TX
The Alamo Model Railroad Engineers meets the 2nd Friday of the month at 7:30 pm in the Zucht Building at the Texas Transportation Museum, 11791 Wetmore Rd., San Antonio TX. For more information call (210) 490-3554 (weekends 9:00 am to 4:00 pm; voicemail only M-F) or visit the website at https://www.txtransportationmuseum.org/ho-scale-indoor-model-railroad.

All Points Model Railroad Association - Conroe, TX
The All Points North Model Railroad Association is open to new members and has business meetings in their clubhouse on the 3rd Saturday of the month at 10:30 am. For more information, including a calendar of activities, please visit their website at http://apnmrr.org/.

Austin Model Railway Society - Austin, TX
The Austin Model Railway Society is a HO scale modular group that is open to new members and meets once a month. For more information please email Steve Jackobs at president@austinrailway.org or visit the web site www.austinrailway.org.

The Greater Baton Rouge Model Railroaders - Jackson, LA
Our mission: to educate and inform the public on the hobby of model railroading, associated disciplines, and to entertain both children and adults through our numerous displays featuring both model trains, real railroads and railroad safety. The Trains run from 10:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. on the 2nd and 4th Saturdays of every month! THE PUBLIC IS INVITED! Located at the Republic of West Florida Historical Museum, 3406 College St, Jackson, LA. More information: http://www.greaterbrrailroaders.com/.

Houston Area "G" Gaugers - Rosenberg, TX
The Houston Area "G" Gaugers (HAGG) model train club meets at the Rosenberg Railroad Museum on the 4th Sunday of each month to run their special trains on the tracks of the Garden Railroad Exhibit. The museum also hosts fun seasonal activities for the kids on this day. Steam engines, circus trains, patriotic trains or everyone's favorite Thomas? You never know what trains you'll see. Rosenberg Railroad Museum, 1921 Avenue F, Rosenberg, TX. More information: info@RosenbergRRMuseum.org.

Houston Area Live Steamers - Hockley, TX
HALS has over 9,000 feet of track for you to enjoy and ride on most any Saturday of the year. Someone

is usually there every Saturday with special run, operations, waybills/timetable, work and fun run days scheduled throughout the year. Our public run days are the 3rd Saturday of the month March through November. Come see our 2,500 foot expansion in Phase 4. Model Railroaders (any scale) are welcome to attend most any time. Check our web site out at www.hals.org for schedule of events or e-mail Rick White at rick.white.jr@gmail.com for more information.

New Braunfels Railroad Museum - New Braunfels, TX
Kids Fun Day is held on the 1st and 3rd Saturday of each month, 10:00 am to 2:00 pm at the New Braunfels Railroad Museum, 302 South San Antonio Street (in the 1907 Restored Railroad Depot), New Braunfels, TX. Museum phone (830) 627-2447. Kids of all ages will have the opportunity to run model trains and become a Jr. Engineer. Also among the displays at the Kids Fun Day will be a large US Army Model Garden (G) Scale and Lego Trains. Visit our Steam Engine, Caboose, Dining Car (available for Birthday Parties) and Box Car. There will be other fun, train related activities and additional model trains, train artifacts, are on display our 1907 depot. The Railroad Museum opens at 10:00 am on Saturdays. For field trip scheduling and more information, call Susan Riordon (210) 542-6121, or visit us at www.nbrrm.org.

North Texas Council of Railroad Clubs – Irving, TX
The North Texas Council of Railroad Clubs (NTC) meets the 3rd Tuesday of the month. Visit the website www.dfwtrainshows.com for more information about the NTC, its meeting site, member clubs or sponsored events.

San Antonio Model Railroad Association - San Antonio, TX
The San Antonio Model Railroad Association, SAMRA, is open to new members and meets on the 2nd Friday of each month at 7:30 pm in the Bob Clarke Rail Heritage Museum, 7702 Narrow Pass, Live Oak, TX. Please visit our website www.samratx.org for information about our activities and their dates and times. Also, like us on Facebook.

San Jacinto Model Railroad Club - Houston, TX
The San Jacinto Model Railroad Club meets in conjunction with the Texas Gulf Division on the 1st Tuesday of each month at the Southwest Central Church of Christ, 4011 W. Bellfort Avenue, Houston, TX. The meeting starts promptly at 7 pm. We will have a clinic and a business meeting. Refreshments will be served. For more information contact Phil Stewart at pstewart1225@yahoo.com.

Texas Northern Model Railroad Club – Dallas, TX (North)
The Texas Northern Model Railroad Club business meeting is the 1st Thursday of the month and has regular meetings on Thursday evenings and most Saturdays. If you like to operate, come by on Tuesday nights to join our weekly operation session. Located in North Dallas at 11999 Plano Road., Suite 154, Dallas, TX 75243. For more information: www.texasnorthern.org.

Texas Western Model Railroad Club – Forest Hills, TX
The Texas Western Model Railroad Club meets for its business meeting every 1st Thursday of the month at 7:00 pm. The Club is located at 6808 Forest Hills Drive, Forest Hills, TX. For more information: (682) 587-2092 or www.twmrc.org.

Excursion Train Trips

Austin Steam Train; Cedar Park, TX; (512) 477-8468; www.austinsteamtrain.org

Grapevine Vintage Railroad; Grapevine, TX; (817) 410-3185; www.gvrr.com

Old Hickory Railroad; Jackson, LA; (225) 634-7397; www.louisianasteamtrain.com

Texas State Railroad; Palestine & Rusk, TX; (888) 987-2461; www.texasstaterr.com

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Please consider our deadlines for submittals and publications to allow adequate lead time to correctly announce your event. Column submission deadlines are the 15th of February, May, August, and November. Publication of the Marker Lamp is the following month. ML

Whose Track Goes Here?

Can you figure out whose layout this photo is from?

If you're the first person to email the correct answer
to rrrduino@huntatrophy.com you'll win a campfire lighting Arduino!

The photo in the September issue was of Walter Reiger's Southern Railroad Rathole Division.

2026 NMRA NATIONAL CONVENTION

CHATTANOOGA, TN
JULY 27 - AUGUST 2, 2026

The NMRA National Convention is coming to Chattanooga for the first time ever in 2026! The Southeastern Region is excited to host NMRA members from around the world in the Scenic City. We have a week full of fun activities planned including:

Layout Tours - Prototype Tours - Steam-Powered Excursions and Dinner Train
Non-Rail Tours and other Activities - Operating Sessions - Special Interest Groups
Railroad Historical Societies - Modeling with the Masters® - Celebration of Models
National Train Show - Banquet

Register today at nmra2026.org!

Photo-Laminate Structures

by Don Winn, MMR

Most of us have a favorite material for building structures. For some, it is wood – and, as they say, nothing looks better than wood if you're modeling a wood structure. Other modelers enjoy working in styrene. Whatever you materials you prefer, it is often a challenge to get your model to look like the 1:1 structure you are trying to duplicate. You often spend a lot of the time on the itty-bity details that provide a sense of realism. What if there was an easier way?

Let's look at a different way to build some interesting structures, using the photo-laminate technique. I certainly don't qualify as an expert on this subject, as this project is actually my first attempt. But I found it to be very easy. Not only that, it is really inexpensive. I had seen several articles about this process (reference the reading list below), and wanted to give it a try.

On one of the branch lines on my Burlington Route layout I model a downtown industrial switching area referred to by old heads at "the Alley Job". Having modeled all of the rail-served industries, I needed to fill in the in-between spaces with some scenery flats. The prototype had a structure that at one time housed a motorcycle shop – making it a great alley scene **(2)**. But it's not a "signature structure" for my layout, so I didn't want to spend a lot of time building it. I decided that this may be a good candidate to give the photo-laminate process a try.

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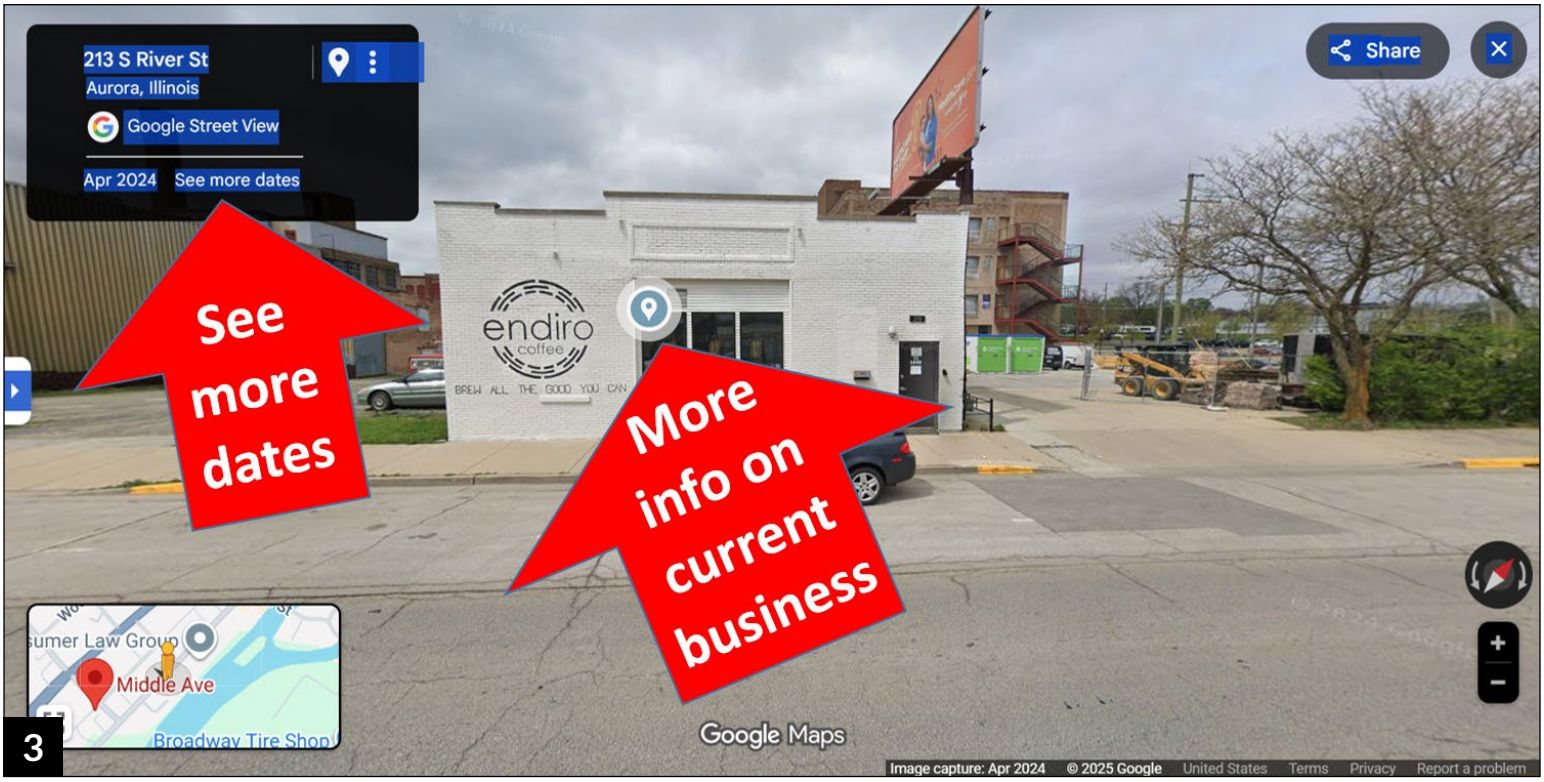
Aurora Cycle in 2015

Google Street View as a Research Tool

Most of what I know about Aurora Cycle is what I learned from searching Google Street View images. One valuable feature for historians is the access to earlier photos. If you click on "See More Dates" **(3)** you can access those photos. Of course, Google Street View didn't launch until 2007, so there is a limit to how far back we can go. Still, it can provide interesting clues about the history of the area.

Clicking on the pin **(3)** you can find out more about the current business. In this case, I clicked on the pin over the Endiro Coffee Roastery and found this interior photo they had posted from 2021 **(4)**, which provides great insight into the building's construction.

Looking through the various Google Street View images on the River Street side **(5)**, we see Aurora Cycle in the earliest photo from 2008.



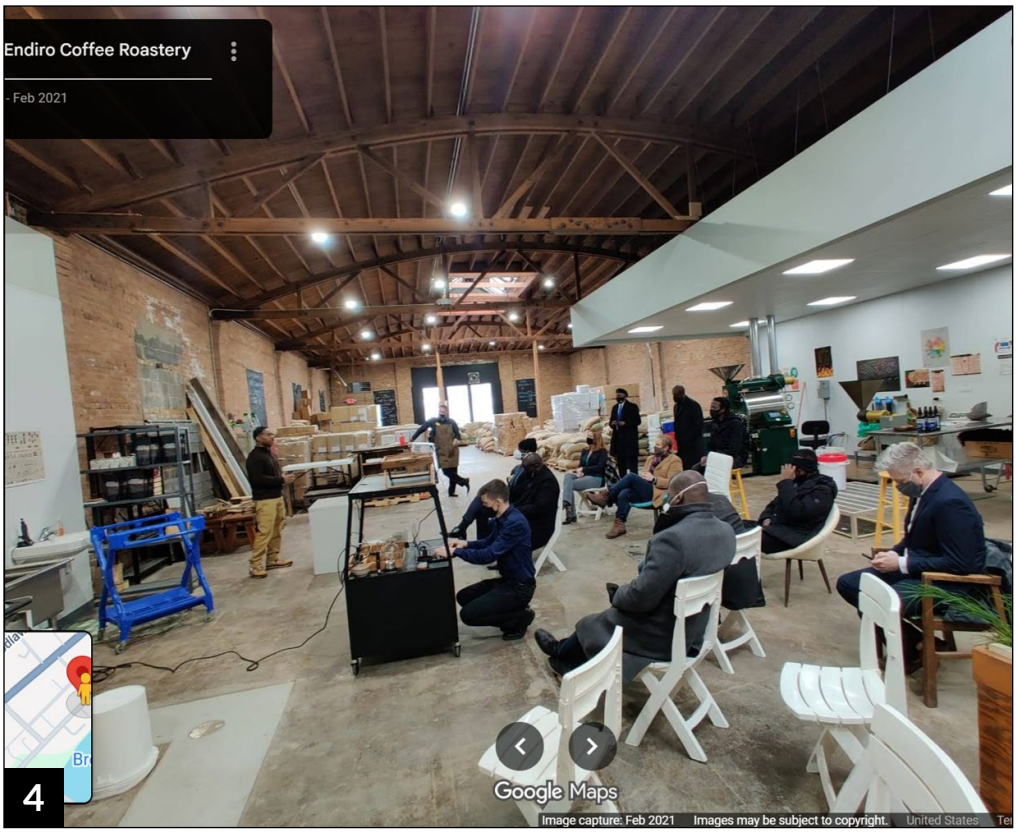
Click on "See more dates" and on the pin to get more information

The Mausoleum Art Gallery appears in the 2012 photo, so we can assume that Aurora Cycle left the area or went out of business sometime between 2008 and 2012, perhaps a victim of the 2008 recession.

Now looking at photos of the building from the alley (Middle Avenue) side **(6)**, we see the Aurora Cycle sign in all of them. But we now know that although the sign endures to this day, the business was active only in the 2007 photo. I don't know how far back its history goes, or if it goes all the way back to the Burlington era. Leo Phillipp noted to me that there was signage for "Aurora Cycle" on the Cross Street side of Valentine Storage in the undated Duane Darnell photo in his article in Burlington Bulletin 51 **(7)**. Shifting our view to look at the Valentine Storage building in 2007 **(8)** we see a chopper on the back dock, so perhaps Aurora Cycle was renting additional work space at the time.

As with many interesting projects I start, I had to decide how far down the rabbit hole I wanted to venture to learn more about Aurora Cycle. If I lived closer to Aurora, I could possible find more information from the library and other sources. But,

Interior photo from 2021



River Street (top) and Middle Avenue (bottom) street views over time

this structure is really just incidental scenery on my layout. I decided to stop my research there and get it modeled. I think a motorcycle shop is an ideal scene for this gritty alley area.

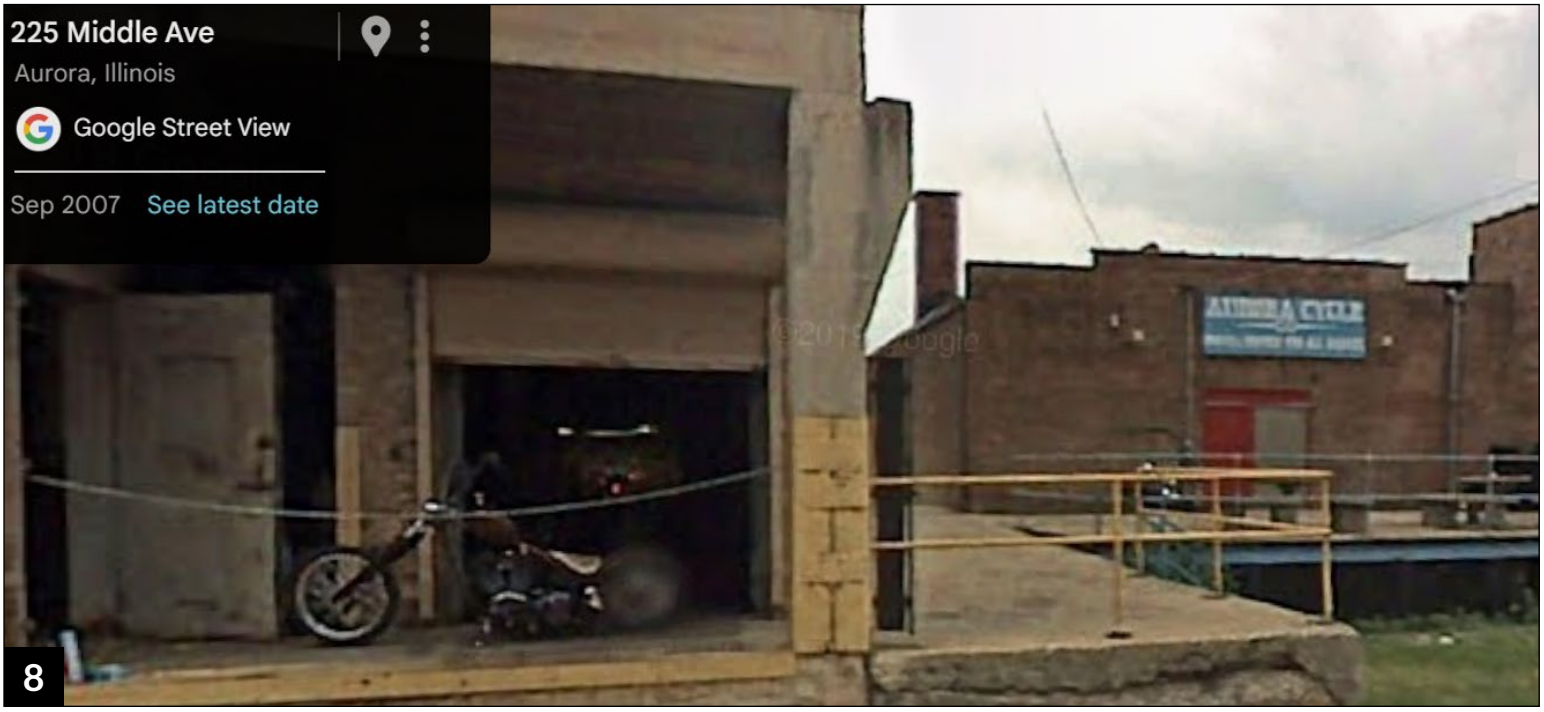
Getting a Clean Photo

The first step is to get a good, clean photo of your prototype structure. If the building is still standing and you are able to visit it, you should take photos from a distance, and perpendicular to the center of the building. A slightly overcast day works best to avoid any annoying shadows.

In my case, I have a few photos I took on a 2015 visit to the area, but I wasn't focused on Aurora Cycle at the time, and I didn't have any shots that were better than the Google images. I chose the 2024 Google photo because the brick work was sharper and there were few foreground distractions. The sign was very faded by 2024 (especially now with the building to the south being torn down), so I used the 2012 photo just for the sign.

Whether you take the photo yourself or find a photo in books or reference materials, you will need to square up the image to eliminate the distortion that makes the top of the structure appear narrower than

Aurora Cycle sign on the Valentine Storage building



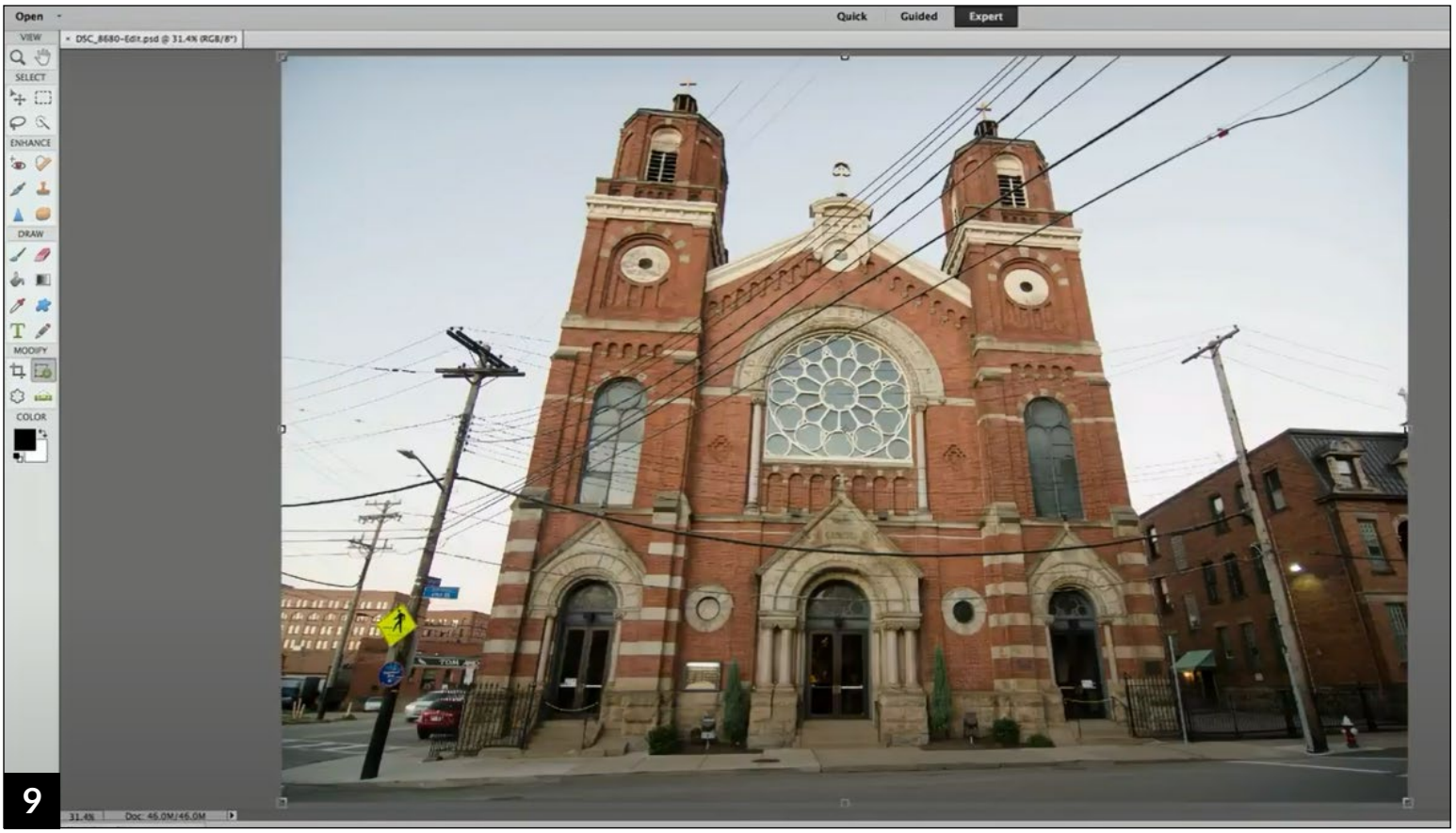
Motorcycle seen in the Valentine Storage building in 2007

the base **(9)**. I used Adobe Photoshop Elements to edit my photo, and found a nice YouTube video that walked me through the process. If you don't have Photoshop or similar program, see if a friend or family member can help you. Maybe your granddaughter knows how to do this.

You will also want to eliminate cars, trees, people and other distractions that may be in the foreground. Photoshop has a tool to erase the unwanted details (like the black trailer in my scene) and it automatically pulls in neighboring parts of the photo to fill it in. I was surprised at how easy it was **(10)**.

I then pasted 2012 image of the clearer sign over the faded sign and my photo was ready to go **(11)**!

I printed multiple copies of the photo on a laser printer using photo paper. If your home printer isn't high quality, Kinko's will print you a copy for 79 cents. My project was small enough that I could fit 3 copies of the photo on a single page.

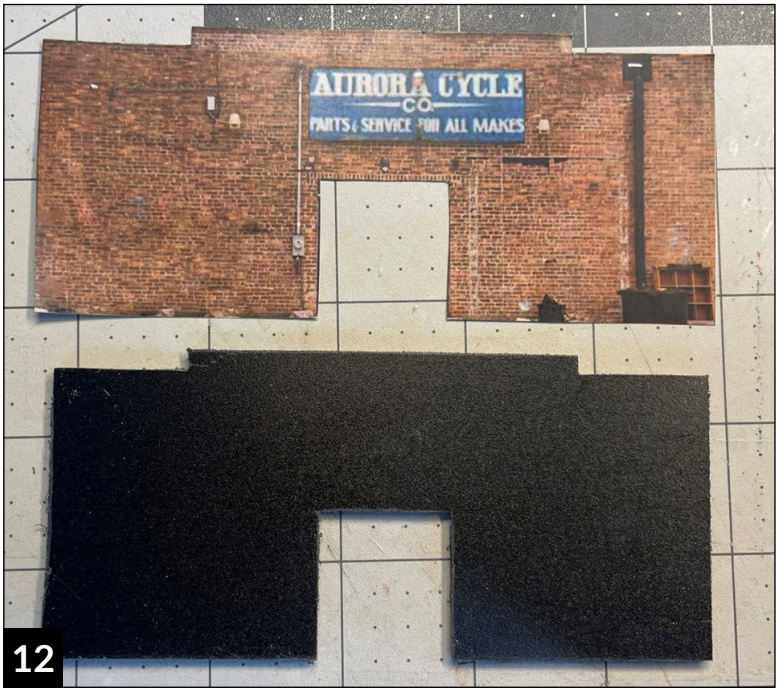


Correcting camera distortion in Photoshop Elements

Foreground distractions removed

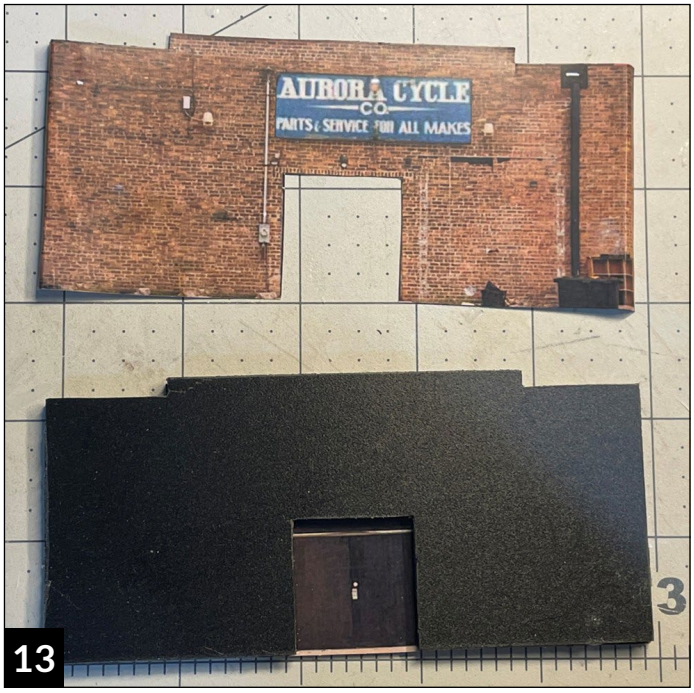
11

Final image, with older sign added



12

Foam board cut to shape



13

Image glued to back of foam board

14

Roof trim adds to the 3D illusion

Building the Structure

I'm building a background flat, but it still needs some depth to give it support. I used foam core as the substrate, although I think I may try .060" illustration board (recommended by Paul Dolkos) on my next project. I cut out the doorway to add a greater illusion of depth **(12)**. I then glued one copy of the photo to the back of the foam core so the doors could be seen **(13)**.

I then glued a second copy of the photo (with the doors cut out) to the front of the foam core using a glue stick. The glue stick allows for some repositioning if you need it. I had cut the foam core a little narrower than the photo so I could wrap the photo around the sides. I then used CA to firmly hold the photo to the sides.

The prototype shows a tile top cap on the brick wall. Pikestuff makes a product which is a perfect match for this. It not only finished off the top edge, but adds a lot to the 3D illusion **(14)**.

Adding Details

Although the clearer sign was already part of my photo, I decided to glue a copy of it to a sheet of styrene to add some depth to it, and glued that in place.

You could add additional details to the face of the structure, but I did not on this project. The electric meter, security lights, piping and downspout in the image look great as they are.

A few motorcycles parked next to the wall complete the scene.

Conclusion

This was a fun and interesting project. I was able to create the structure I wanted with far less work than scratchbuilding it. The details look fantastic, even when you get your face down there less than a foot away. I have plans to try this again with a much larger structure.

You can also use this process for just parts of your structure. I'm presently scratchbuilding a cinder block structure. The windows that I need are not available commercially, so I am using photos, which give it a more realistic look.

I recommend giving this process a try on your layout. If you have any questions, I would be happy to help.

Notes and further reading

- A version of this article will be published in the Burlington Route Historical Society's *Zephyr* magazine
- How to Build Photo-Laminate Structures by Lance Mindheim. *Model Railroader* February 2025
- Make Realistic-Looking Buildings from Photos and Plastic by Paul J. Dolkos. *Model Railroader* May 2012
- Merging Modeling Techniques by Thomas Oxnard. *Model Railroader* June 2025 **ML**

Join the Lone Star Region
Member Directory

Instant Church Directory
Social Networking
Open

The LSR has a member directory! **Joining is completely optional,**
and only the information you choose to provide will be included.
For privacy, the directory is only accessible to those who participate.

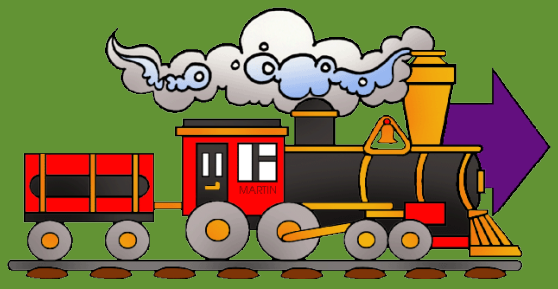
We encourage all members to join, especially if you're interested in visiting other model railroaders while traveling in the region -- this directory will be a great resource!

To join or if you have questions, contact Chuck Lind at chucklind46@gmail.com.
Once he adds you to the system, you'll be able to access the directory using the **Instant Church Directory** app on your smartphone or tablet.

To get started: Install the Instant Church Directory app. Create a login using the same email address you gave Chuck. (**The emails must match, or you won't be able to log in.**) Choose a password with at least 8 characters, including 2 capital letters, numbers, or symbols. Check your email (including your spam folder) for a confirmation message and click the link to verify your account.

Once verified, you can browse the directory, update your own information and photo, and choose how much (or how little) you want to share.

We hope you'll join and help us build a valuable resource for all LSR members!



Wanted!
Nominees for the LSR Youth Award

Who: Any boy or girl 18 years old or younger with an interest in model railroading

Where: One nominee from each LSR Division

A past awardee: May be renominated for another year if they meet the qualifications specified in the LSR Constitution. **Contact Don Winn** donswinn@gmail.com

How: Fill out the special Youth Award Membership Form available on https://lsrnmra.org/

When: Submit your nomination to your LSR Division Director **today**!

For more information contact:
Don Winn, Youth Chairman: donswinn@gmail.com

Making Connections In 2026

by Peter Kazmir, Convention Publicity Chair

I hope you're as excited as I am about the opportunity to make new Connections and renew old friendships at the 2026 LSR Convention. Next year's convention will be held in Austin, Texas, June 18–21, 2026—an easy trip for many in our Region and well worth the journey for everyone else.

The Committee has been working for months to create an event with something for everyone, from outstanding clinics and layout tours to rare behind-the-scenes tours. We've also been working hard to make this one of the most affordable LSR conventions in years.

We've secured space at the Wyndham Garden Austin hotel, which is located at the same site as the very first LSR Convention in Austin back in 1988, just south of downtown on Interstate 35. A special room rate of only $96 per night for guests has been secured if you register before April 30.

Paired with the early bird convention registration of only $75—which includes the Saturday evening banquet—we're doing everything we can to keep the cost of attendance down.

Activities kick off Thursday afternoon, with the first clinics beginning at 2:30 pm. We've scheduled over 50 clinic sessions, and dozens are already filled, covering topics such as bridges, operations, prototype modeling, 3D printing, track planning, and even modeling crime scenes. Eleven MMRs are already confirmed as presenters, including Cinthia and Stephen Priest.

We're already working hard on finalizing the details of our off-site activities as well. Among those planned are a first-ever tour of the Ash Grove Cement Plant south of Austin. We'll get a behind-the-scenes tour, including the railroad facilities served by Union Pacific.

We're also planning an event at the Austin Steam Train Association's yard, where (by next year) several new cars will be in operation, under restoration, or on display. That's in addition to their 1910 Mikado, the former SP 786.

Visit Steve Nelson's HO Scale MKT Sedalia Division while you're at the convention

Take a ride on the Austin & Texas Central

If that's not enough live steam for you, we're planning a visit to the latest incarnation of the Austin & Texas Central 7 1/2" gauge railroad northwest of town.

If you're a big fan of layout tours and operations, we've got great news for you. There will be dozens of layouts - including multiple scales - open for both, and *five* different operating session time slots, on Thursday, Friday, and Sunday.

We're also excited to have Bruce Blalock back with us as our special guest speaker (and clinician). Those of you who remember him from our 2014 convention will remember Bruce well. Bruce has worked for the Union Pacific, Durango and Silverton, and the Austin Steam Train as a conductor, diesel engineer and steam engineer

Visit Bob Fricke's On30 Denver & Rio Grande Western as well

How about a behind-the-scenes tour of the Ash Grove Cement Plant?

Visit the Austin Steam Train Association yard and facilities

-- and he has some great stories to go along with that career.

Of course, we'll have a fantastic contest room as always - be sure to get started now!

We're also bringing back the Silent Auction based on popular demand. Have stuff you don't need anymore? Looking to pick up some great items at great prices? Look no further, we have you covered.

We're lining up some great general-interest activities as well, taking advantage of all that central Texas has to offer. Off-site events will include visits to the Bullock Texas History Museum and the Lady Bird Johnson Wildlife Center, with more still being planned. We'll have plenty of on-site events too, including some fun games and arts & crafts.

And of course, the raffle and door prizes are planned too! Who knows what you might win!

Our website is live and updated frequently as plans come together. Visit connections2026.com (or 2026-convention.lsrnmra.org) to register and reserve your hotel room while early-bird pricing and the special room rate are available.

We hope you'll join us next June—deep in the heart of Texas. **ML**

Visit the Bullock Texas History Museum

Get Ready to Participate in the Convention Contest!

The contest room is a highlight of every model railroading convention. It's easy to be amazed at what your fellows modelers have created, but it's also a great opportunity to learn, to push yourself to grow as a modeler, and to show the world what a great hobby this is.

Win or lose, the feedback you can get from your entries can be a great way to learn how to build the best quality models possible.

There are a broad range of categories to choose from, so why not participate and help this year be the best ever? Get out those hobby knives, soldering irons, cameras and crocheting needles and get creative!

In addition to the awards for each category, there are a number of special awards from Best Tree to awards for the best logging-themed module. See the overall contest rules for the full list.

Categories

Models

- Steam Locomotive
- Diesel Locomotive
- Traction or Other Locomotive
- Passenger Cars
- Freight Cars
- Cabooses
- Maintenance of Way
- Structures on Line
- Structures Off Line
- Bridges & Trestles
- Displays/Modules
- Favorite/Complete Train

Photos

- Photos of a Model (B&W / Color)
- Photos of a Prototype (B&W / Color)
- Computer-Enhanced Photo

Arts & Crafts

- Railroadiana
- Needlework
- Special Theme: Connections
- General

Find out more about the contest, categories, and rules at https://2026-convention.lsrnmra.org/contest

And consider helping out as a contest judge -- no experience necessary. Information is on the website.

Good luck! We can't wait to see what you bring!

A Handy Paint Handle

by Steve Sandifer, MMR

Anyone who airbrushes rolling stock knows the need to clean a car first and keep it clean throughout the painting process. I heard of this method long ago, so I did not invent it, but it works for me and may be helpful to others.

I put on my gloves and then wash my model in Dawn dishwashing detergent. This brand is known for its grease fighting capabilities. Once clean, and again wearing gloves, I attach my painting handle. It will stay on the model through the decal and clear coating process, so there is no need to physically touch the model until it is ready for trucks and couplers. Having a handle allows the car to be turned to any angle to get to the nooks and crannies of an intricate car. Once painted, the car can be suspended from a hook until the paint is dry. **(2)**

The handle has two parts: a piece of conduit and an Old Work Device Support ($1.14 at Home Depot). The Old Work Device Support is a piece of stamped metal designed to hold a metal electric box in a wall where electrical service is being changed. A number of companies make these, but you want one with the longest legs possible, as the length of those legs determines the separation between your hand and the model you are painting. A greater distance is better for airbrushing.

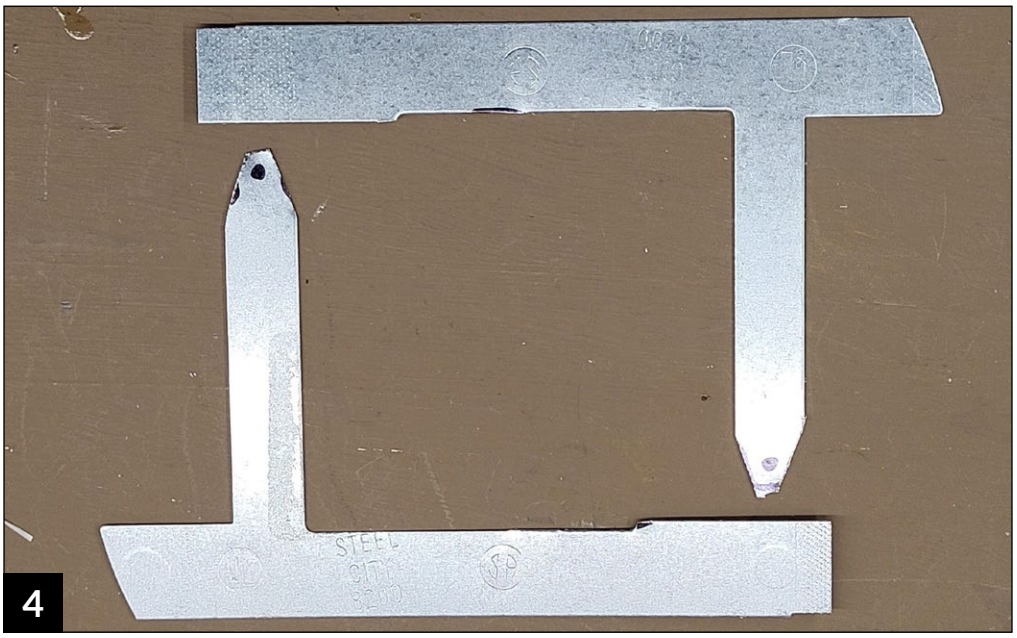
1

2

Cut the Old Work Device as shown in **(3)** and **(4)**. Drill the tips with a clearance drill #43 for a 2-56 screw. Bend the tips up 90 degrees. Attach the tips to your car bolster with 2-56 screws. The handle across the top is a piece of conduit slightly flattened with a hammer. The size conduit depends on the manufacturer of the Old Work Device that you use, 5/8 ID is probably good. It should fit when flattened a bit but should not be able to spin - you need to be able to control the handle. **(5)** Any commercial electrician will probably have a piece in his truck he will give you. I keep several lengths in my box for different length cars. **ML**

STEEL

3


STEEL

4

40 FOOT
LOCTITE
SUPER GLUE
PROFESSIONAL LIQUID

5

LSR CONVENTION

2026 CONNECTIONS

AUSTIN, TEXAS

The LSR convention is returning to the Austin area!

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at the

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Dozens of Clinics • Operating Sessions • Layout Tour
Prototype Tours • Special Guest Clinicians and Speaker
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Great Location at the Center of it All!

Connections2026.com

Register Today!

Roadbed and Trackwork: The Core Elements of your Layout

by Cliff Scherer
gettingstarted@centexnmra.org

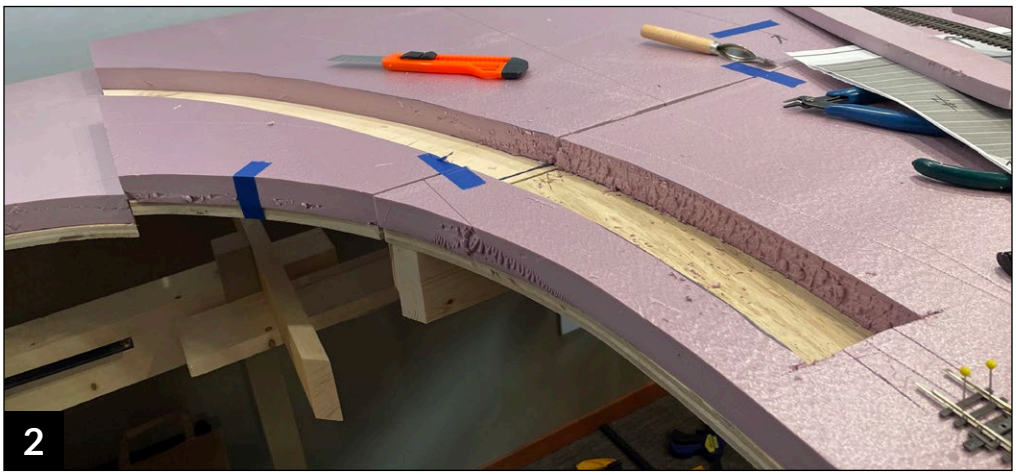
Trackwork is at the core of any layout – without it, there can be no trains. In the last *Getting Started* we constructed the layout benchwork for the Fredericksburg & Northern. This time we'll get the sub-roadbed, roadbed, and track down.

Trackwork is one of the areas in model railroading that can utilize many different approaches, materials, and techniques. The correct approach is always the one that works best for you. The F&N layout uses 1" XPS foam on ½" plywood as the sub-roadbed for most flat areas and various methods for inclined areas (grades). There are 3 different roadbed heights ranging from two thicknesses of cork to none at all. In this column look at the different ways that the trackwork comes together on the F&N.

Before we start, we need to mention brands of track. The track on the F&N is all Walthers flex track and turnouts. However, this column is not intended to recommend any particular brand. As we go along, we will look at some criteria that you should consider when selecting the brand of track.

1

An SP freight rolls into Comfort, Texas from the east over freshly laid track on the HO scale Fredericksburg & Northern. There is a lot going on with trackwork in this scene including 2 ways to build grades, 3 levels of roadbed, spiked tracked, glued track and even distressed abandoned track on the spur trailing away at the left.



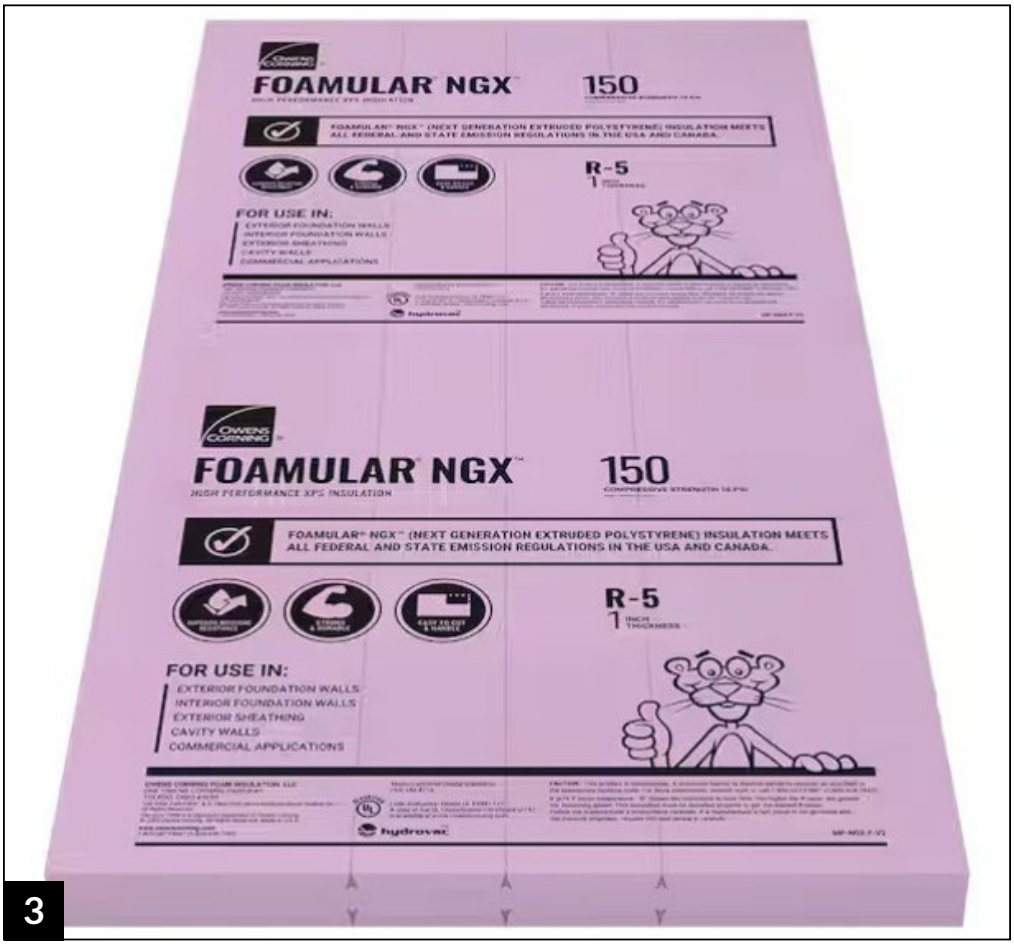
2

A 1" layer of XPS foam on ½" plywood provides a neat, easy way to add a cut for the track running down from the right to the lower layout level on the left.

XPS Foam for Sub Roadbed: What Is It and Why Use It?

The F&N layout has ½" plywood on top of most areas of benchwork. This provides structural rigidity to the layout. There is nothing wrong with stopping here and just applying cork roadbed to the plywood – it's commonly done. But adding a layer of foam provides several enhancements that are worth the extra effort:

1. Provides a quick and easy way to pin down track as a trial before gluing roadbed.
2. Can be cut and sculpted to add realistic landforms including ditches, slopes, etc.
3. Scenery elements like trees can be added by simply inserting them into the foam without drilling as would be needed in plywood.
4. XPS Foam accepts adhesives just as readily as plywood. Just make sure your adhesive is made for construction foam, such as Liquid Nails Fuze-It or Locktite Power Grab All Purpose.



3

XPS Foam, is Extruded Polystyrene Foam used in construction work for insulation. It is typically sold in 4'x8' sheets. There are faced and unfaced varieties – use the unfaced for sub roadbed on a layout. The foam sheets are sold in ½", 1" and 2" thickness. On the F&N, 1" was selected because it gives enough depth to carve scenery elements but is not so deep that it causes problems with switch machines that have throw rods coming from under the layout. Note that XPS foam does not act as a sound deadener – in fact, it reflects sound into the room. For this reason, it's best to use cork roadbed under the track or only lay track directly on the foam in areas such as yards where trains are moving slowly.

4

Foam is easily cut with a razor type utility knife – the thinner the blade, the better. When the benchwork was constructed, the plywood was cut based on the track plan printed full size. To cut the foam to shape, simply lay the plywood on top of the foam and trace the outline with the utility knife. Alternatively, use the full-size printed track plan as the template.

Attaching the Foam to the Plywood

5

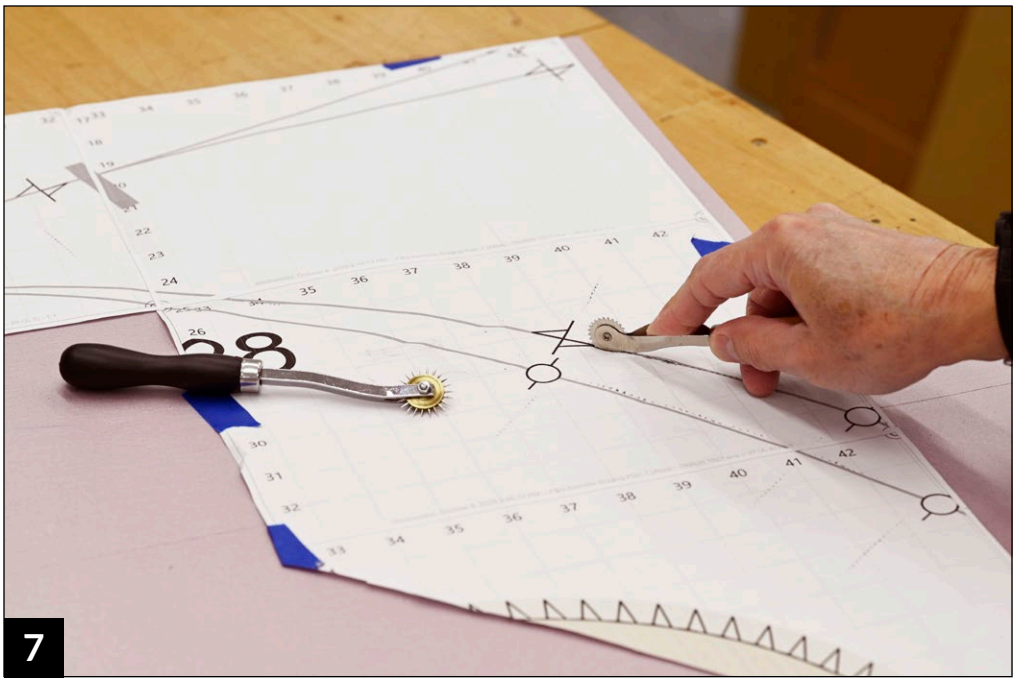
Use an adhesive that is compatible with foam – Liquid Nails Fuze-It is great for this purpose and has the added benefit of being "instant" grab meaning it does not need to be clamped or weighted to stay in place. You will have about 5 minutes to position the foam before it's locked in place and should not be adjusted further. Use a plastic paint scraper to smooth the adhesive to about 1/16" so that it won't leave high spots under the foam.

6

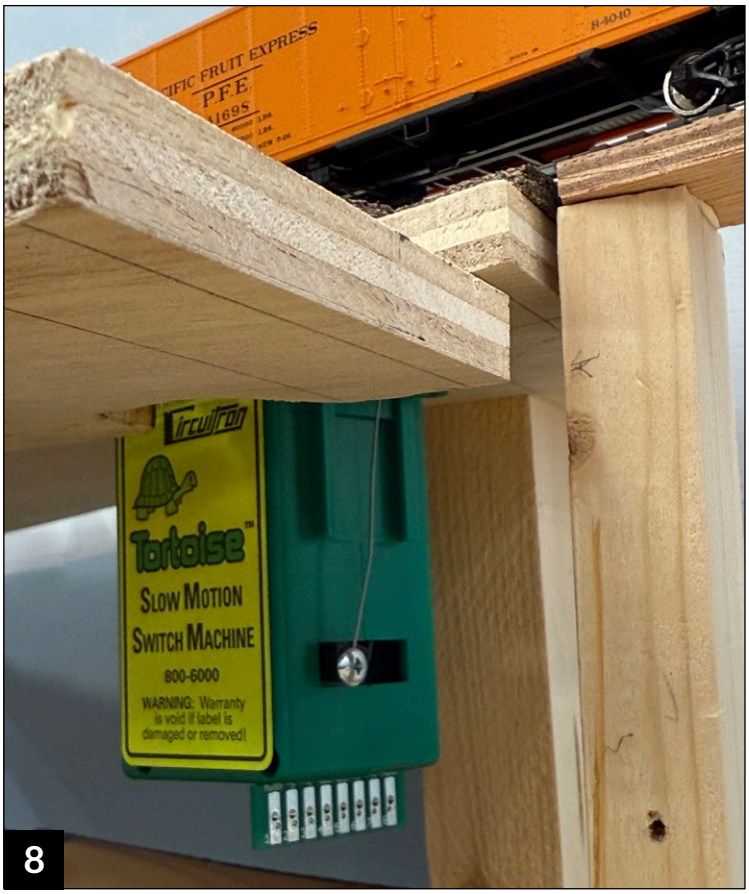
Once the foam has been pressed down firmly it's ready to work on in about an hour (for example gluing down roadbed). But if you want to paint it, you can do so immediately. On the F&N, the foam is first primed with a multi-surface water-based primer. INSLX STIX Urethane Acrylic Primer is a great choice. Remember that if you paint, anything you want to glue to the foam in the future will actually be glued to the paint. The STIX primer will help create a bond strong enough to keep everything together.

Marking the Track Plan on the Sub-Roadbed

With the foam in place as our sub-roadbed, we need to mark where the roadbed and track will be laid. If you have been following this series, you'll recall that we designed the track plan in AnyRail and printed it full size. We used these printouts as templates to cut plywood surfaces. Now we'll use them to mark the foam sub-roadbed.



Simply lay the track plan on the foam and use a dull-point punch wheel as shown. The sharp-point punch wheel on the left is used if you need to mark plywood instead of foam.



As you are marking the track plan, look for potential problems with switch machine locations. It's a good idea to double-check and make adjustments now rather than after track is laid. This photo shows a tight location for the Tortoise switch machine. Remember to allow for access to the machine in the future for maintenance.

Now is also the time to confirm that you are leaving enough clearance for structures and scenery, especially in tight spots like this. The index card has been cut to the same width as the building that will go in this space with loading docks on both sides. The building is an unbuilt kit but dimensions were shown in the plans.

Creating Grades for Elevation Changes

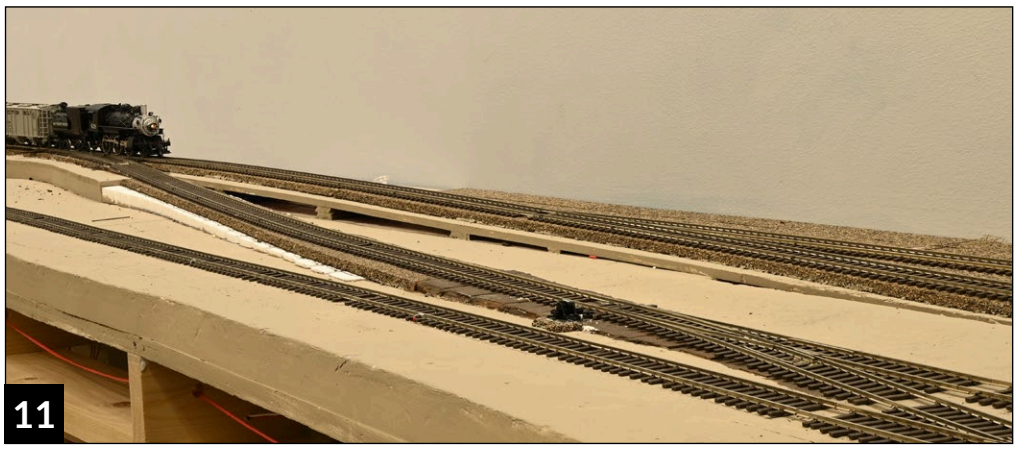
If your layout has elevation changes, you will need to get the grades in place before you can lay roadbed or track. For our purposes, we are using the word "grade" to describe track that is inclined from one level area to another level that is at a different height.

Model railroad grades are generally described as a percentage calculated by dividing the rise by the run and multiplying by 100. Therefore, a ½" rise over 25" of run is (0.5/25) x100=2%.

There are 3 things to be concerned with when it comes to grades on your layout:

1. Grades above 2% can look unrealistic, and those higher than 3% can be problematic for trains to even make it up the grade. Engine power and train length will influence the maximum grade that a train can manage.
2. Curves on grades increase the friction that an engine has to overcome to get the train up the grade.
3. The grade, expressed as a formula of (rise/run)x100, is not a true measure because it assumes a hard change to level at each end. A train needs a vertical curve at the top and bottom of the grade. This will ease the engine and cars from inclined to level. The sharper the vertical curve, the more likely that cars will uncouple or even derail. This factor is influenced by car length, coupler heights, and engine wheel configurations. The need for gentle vertical curves can add several inches to each end of the grade.

Grades can be built in many ways. Here, risers attached to the joists are used to create grades. The height of the riser at each joist is given in the AnyRail track planning software. This takes some of the guess work out of getting the grade percentage correct.



Other ways of creating grades include using shims, thin pieces of wood, cork, and foam risers. In this view, the grade in the back rises from the flat foam on a ¼" strip of plywood. At the lower end, the plywood descends smoothly into a recess in the flat foam sub-roadbed, while it is supported as it rises with pieces of wood. The grade in front is built using a combination of Woodland Scenics foam risers, wood, and plastic construction shims plus bits of sheet styrene. Make sure the material you use for shims will remain stable over time. For example, cardboard is not good as a shim because it can expand or shrink with humidity changes.

Notice the two vertical curves here. The left track - the SP mainline - includes a much gentler transition from level to inclined than the track on the right - the F&N mainline. The F&N represents a short line that doesn't have the money for really nice trackwork, and the F&N will feature 40' cars and short diesels or small steam engines. In addition, the diverging track in the foreground begins its descent before the end of the turnout. Before gluing everything in place, be sure to test it thoroughly with the equipment that will actually be used.

Laying the Roadbed - Or Not

Prototype railroads have track at many different levels especially in yard and industrial areas. It's great to model these differences, but many avoid it because of the transitions from one level to the next in a very short distance. If you are running very long engines and rolling stock, such roadbed height changes are difficult, but on the F&N the setting is 1955 and it's a branchline/shortline setup with short cars and simple engines. In this situation, we can lay track on 2 heights of roadbed plus no roadbed at all. Primary track (the SP mainline) is on ¼" HO scale cork roadbed. Secondary track, such as the SP passing siding is on 1/8" N scale cork roadbed. Tertiary tracks are yard tracks and spurs. They are laid directly on the foam sub-roadbed.

In **(15)**, also note that 1/8" N Scale cork roadbed is being laid. Three of these strips are about right for HO scale track. They will leave the ends of the ties exposed when ballasted which is about right for secondary track or short line track.

If you are laying HO scale cork roadbed, you should sand the beveled shoulders before laying track. Some modelers also sand the surface of the cork to smooth it, but if you use the adhesive recommended here and you press it down along the entire length, sanding the surface should not be needed.

This scene of Santa Fe tracks at Friona, Texas clearly shows the neatly ballasted ATSF mainline on the left, the lower and less maintained passing siding in the center, and the elevator siding on the ground at the right. This and other prototype scenes were the inspiration for the ballasted heights of tracks on the F&N. *(photographer and date unknown)*

Here are the 3 levels of track on the F&N at Comfort, Texas. On the left, the station house track is on the foam, next over with the road diesel is the SP main on ¼" HO scale cork, and to the right of that, the switcher is on the SP passing siding with 1/8" cork sheet. Notice the transitions between the different levels – all have been tested with the equipment that will be run on the layout and no derailments or uncouplings were encountered.

Cork roadbed is glued along the track centers marked previously with Liquid Nails Fuze-It. It's important to spread the adhesive to about 1/16" because it is very viscous and can leave high spots under the cork. It is instant grab, giving 5 minutes to position the cork and then it locks in place. Don't try to move the cork after this or the bond will be weak when it dries. The nice thing about instant grab is that you don't normally need weights to hold the cork down while it dries like you do with white glue or wood glue. It's also nice to be able to begin laying track on the cork in as little as an hour.

Cork Roadbed Under Turnouts

It is possible to buy cork roadbed that has been pre-cut for turnouts but, given the many sizes of turnouts and the scarcity of cork, it's easier to cut your own from cork sheets.

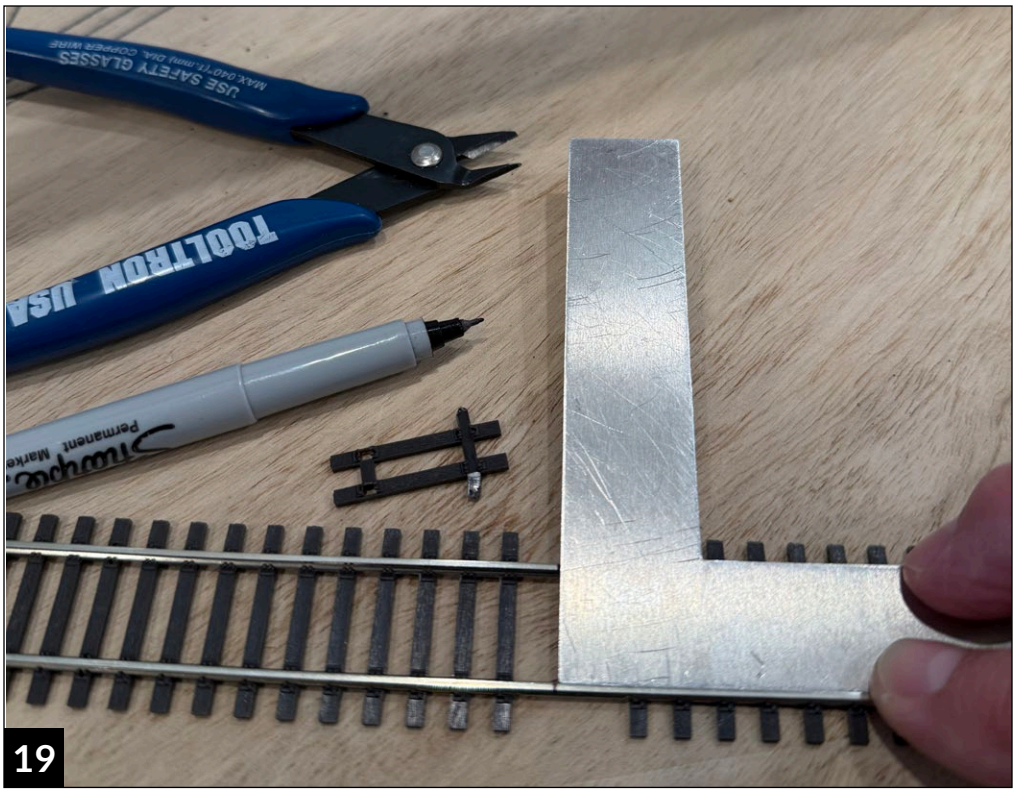
To cut cork for a turnout roadbed, create a paper template or just use the turnout itself and mark the cork with a white grease pencil.

Cut the cork between a 45 and 60 degree bevel with a razor utility knife.

The resulting cork should have a beveled shoulder and fit under the turnout.

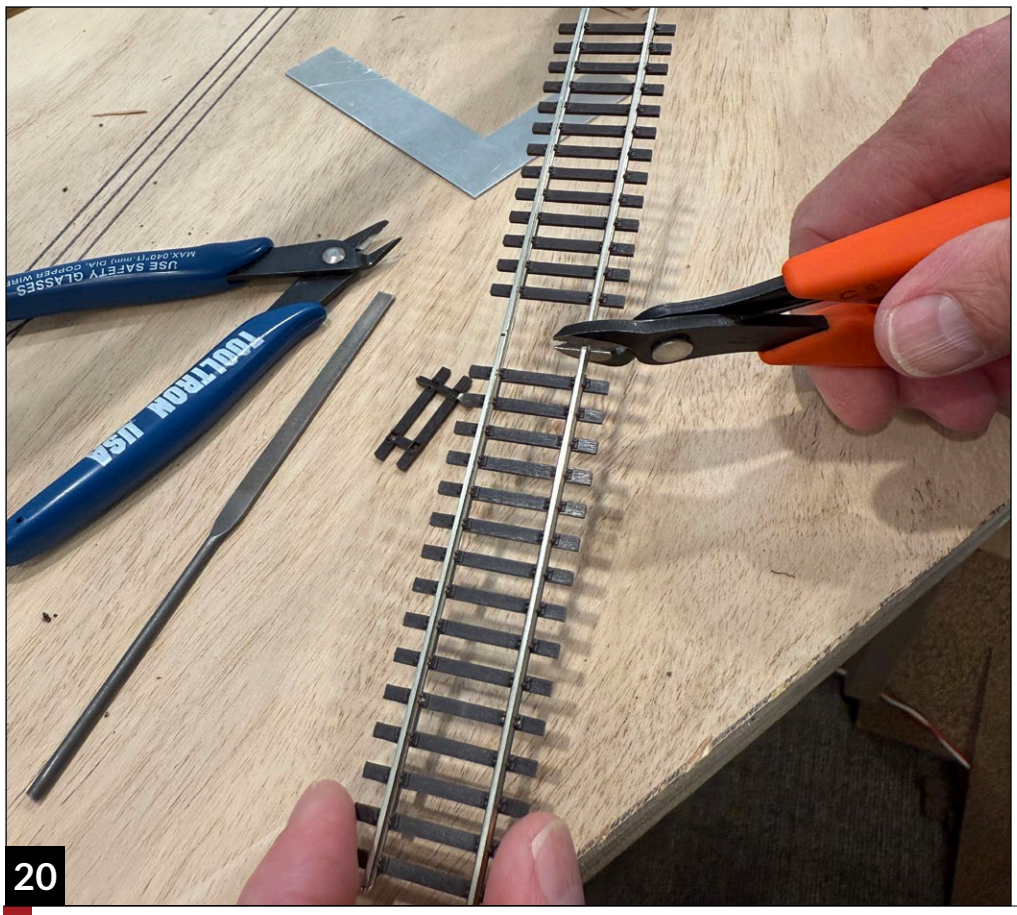
Laying Track

Let's get some track down on this layout. On the F&N, three different methods are used to secure the track to the roadbed or the foam: adhesive, track spikes and track nails. The adhesive is latex caulk, available in brown tones for less chance of showing through the ballast. Track spikes are ¼" spikes from Micro Engineering and the track nails are simply 5/8" small flat-head nails from the hardware store. Before we can use these methods let's get the track cut to length.



19

To get tight rail joints, it's important to make the cuts in line with each other. Here a small machinist's square is used to mark the cut locations. An extra fine point Sharpie is used to mark the cut. Before cutting, use nippers to remove the ties on either side of the cut. If the cut is on a curve, the track will need to be pinned in the exact radius of the curve and marked, because curving the track will move the sliding rail relative to the fixed rail.

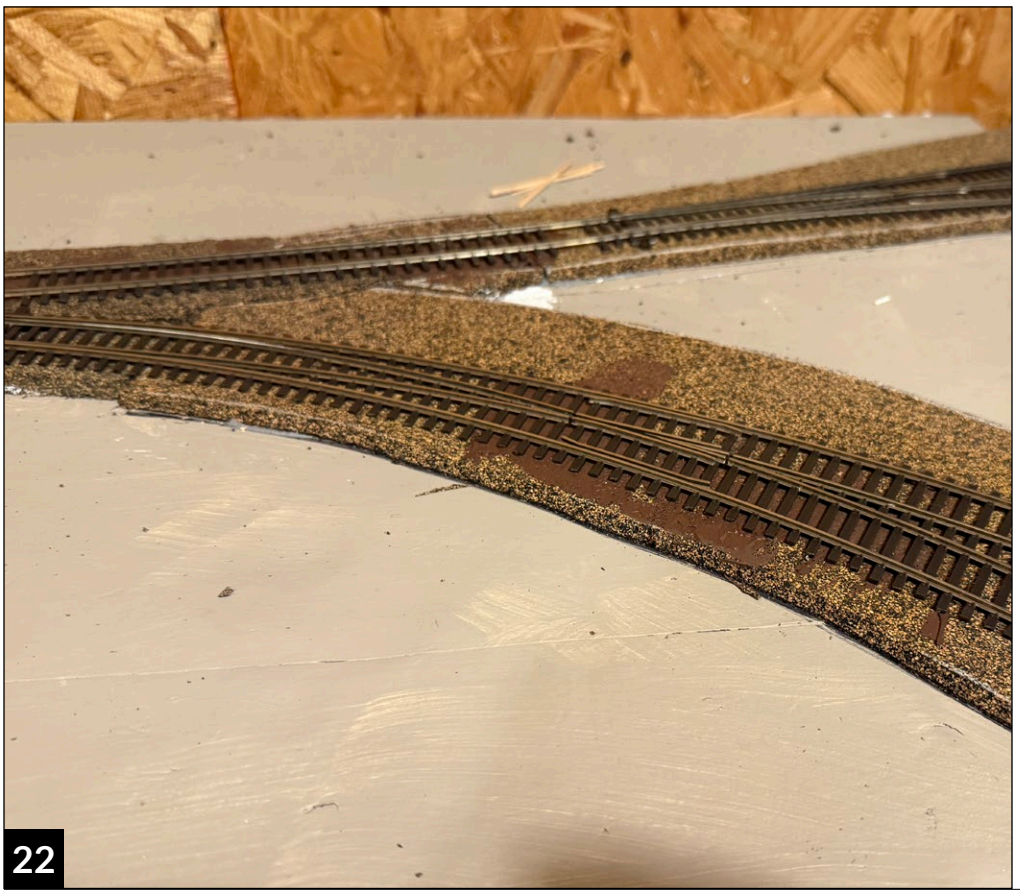


20

Once the rail has been marked, use track cutters to make the cut. Many modelers swear by the Xuron Track Cutter, model 2175B. The cutter should be held as shown in this image and be perpendicular to the rail. The flat side of the cutter jaws need to face the section of track that will be used on the layout. The Xuron Track Cutters do a great job of making a clean cut, but there will still be some burrs. Use a small flat file, like the one shown between the track and the nippers. First file the face of the cut flat. Then remove the burrs from the top, bottom and both sides of the rail. Use your finger to feel for burrs – it's easy to tell if you've removed them. Nickel-silver rail is relatively soft, and it doesn't take much effort to remove burrs.

21

Spiking track – you either enjoy it or find it tedious. Just as I find using a block plane relaxing in woodworking, I find spiking track enjoyable. The Walthers track being used here has spike holes pre-drilled on every 12th and 13th tie alternating. The holes fit track spikes perfectly and they are in correct position against the rails. Spiking track is easily done with spiking pliers, but it can be accomplished with small needle nose pliers. Spiking track in this manner will hold even in XPS foam, but not permanently. It's a great way to lay track and then make changes if needed before you ballast. Gluing the ballast will also glue the track.



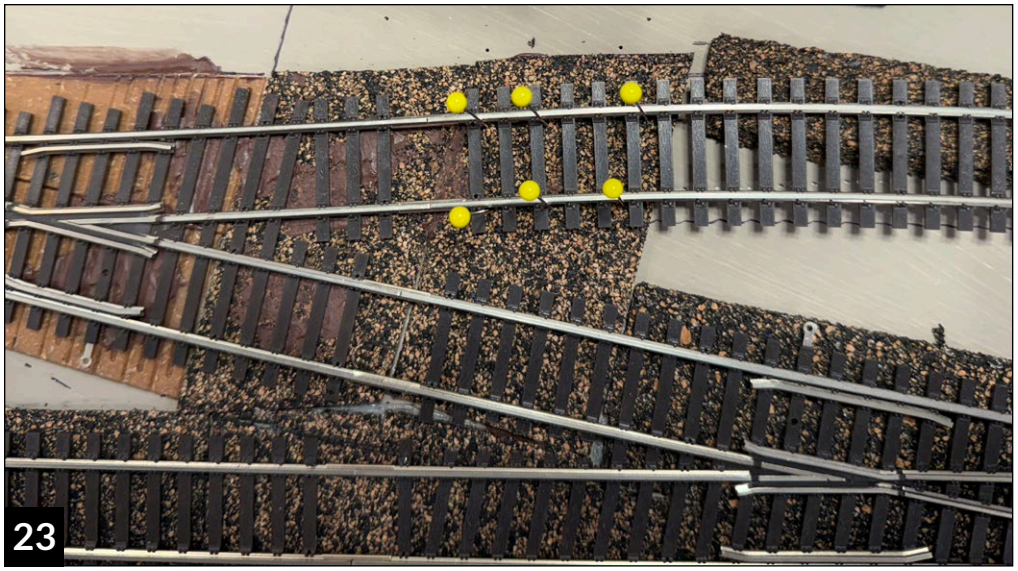
22

If spiking track is not your thing, gluing works just as well and is more permanent. Use latex caulk for the glue and be careful to smooth it out so that it does not ooze up between the ties. Spreading a thin layer on the cork or the foam is all that's needed. The caulk may look messy, but it will be covered by ballast in the future. Don't apply caulk in the area of the point rails. Track nails are another option, but the better quality flex track does not come with holes to receive the nails. You will need to drill small holes, usually in the center of the ties at a spacing of about 6".

Curving Flex Track

One objective in laying track is to avoid kinks where the joints between tracks are not smooth. This requires special attention when curving flex track, which always wants to stay straighter than your curve. Two techniques can help with this:

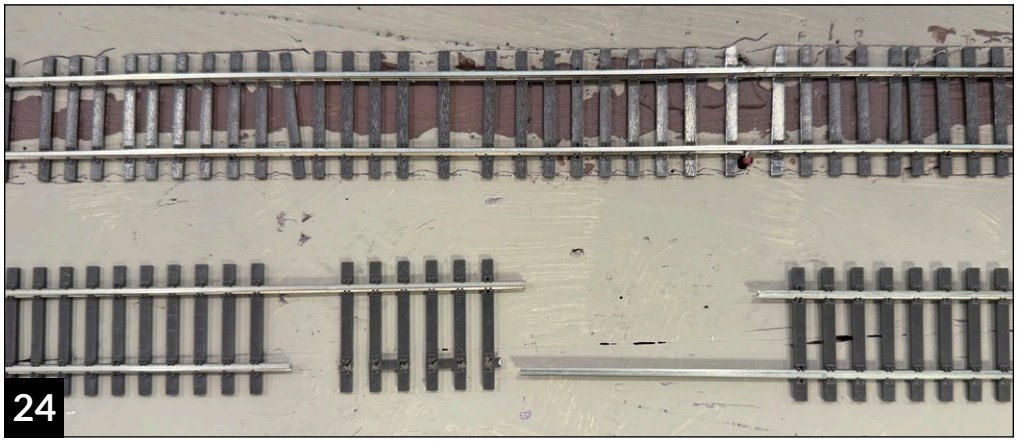
1. When joining a flex track curve to a section of fixed, straight track, such as a turnout, pin the flex so that 2 inches or more remain straight before starting the curve.
2. If 2 sections of flex track join on a curve, connect and solder them together while they are straight. Then put them in position and curve them.



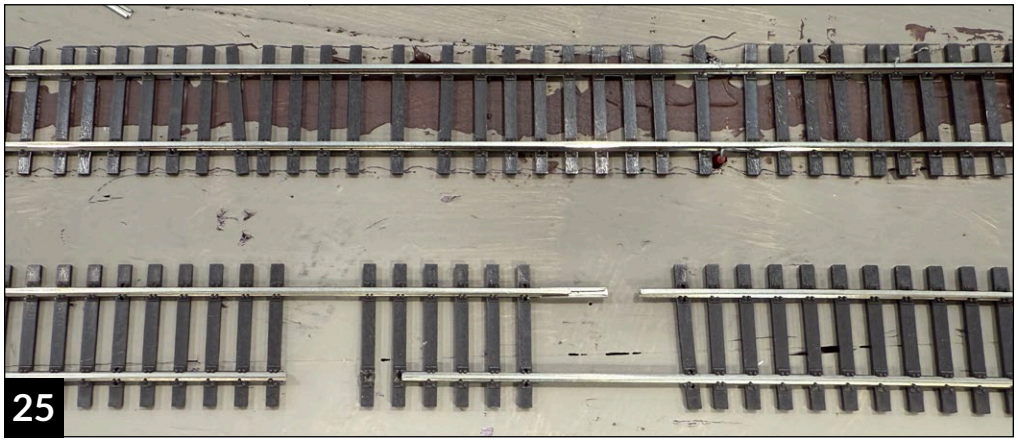
Notice how the pins hold the first 2" of flex track straight from the turnout. If the flex is allowed to begin its curve at the turnout joint, it will tend to create a kink at the joint which can result in derailments.

Offset Rail Joints for Curved Flex Track

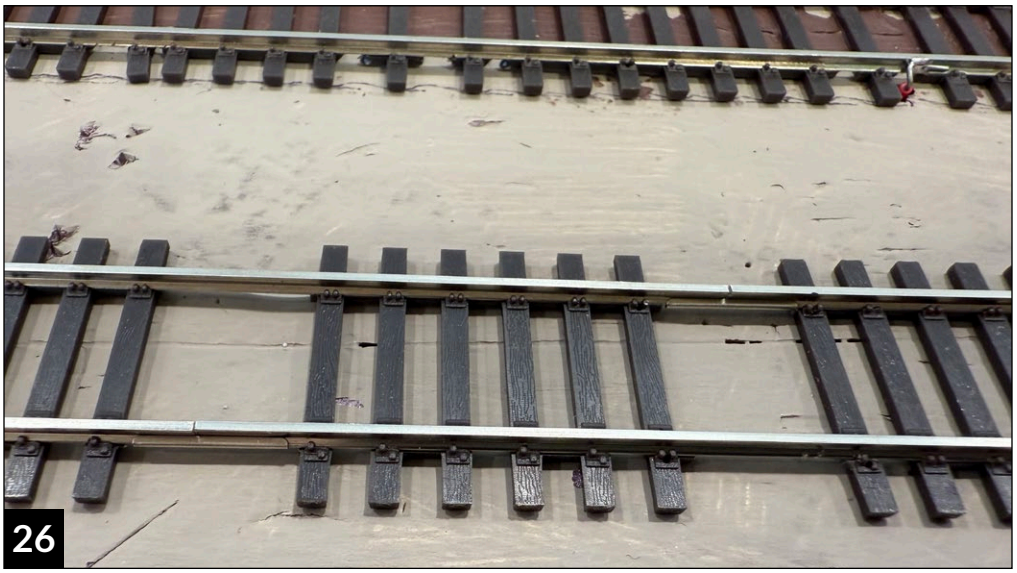
When joining two sections of flex track on a curve many modelers recommend soldering the joint while straight and then curving the flex. Here we will look at a variation on that technique: we will offset the rail joints before soldering them straight.



To make offset joints in flex track, start by sliding the rail in one track out and the rail on the opposing track in. Remove one tie from the end of the first track and one tie from the end of the opposing track. Count at least six ties in on the opposing track and, at that point, take out two more ties. For reference, in the image the opposing track is the one on the left.



Now carefully slide the rail from the first track into the track spikes on the opposing track. Before you snug up the joints, insert rail joiners.



26

This image shows the offset joint snugged up and ready for solder.

Here are sections of flex track using the offset joint technique curved into 22" and 18" radius curves in the hidden staging area on the west end of the F&N layout.

27

Soldering Technique

In the previous section, soldering was mentioned several times. Covering this topic is beyond the scope of this installment of Getting Started, but it's an important skill that you should practice. There are many good tutorials online, so if you need some work in this area, get a good soldering iron, watch a couple of tutorials and practice using scrap pieces of track. Once you've got the hang of it, you'll be able to solder track joints without melting the ties and with far less solder than is often used.

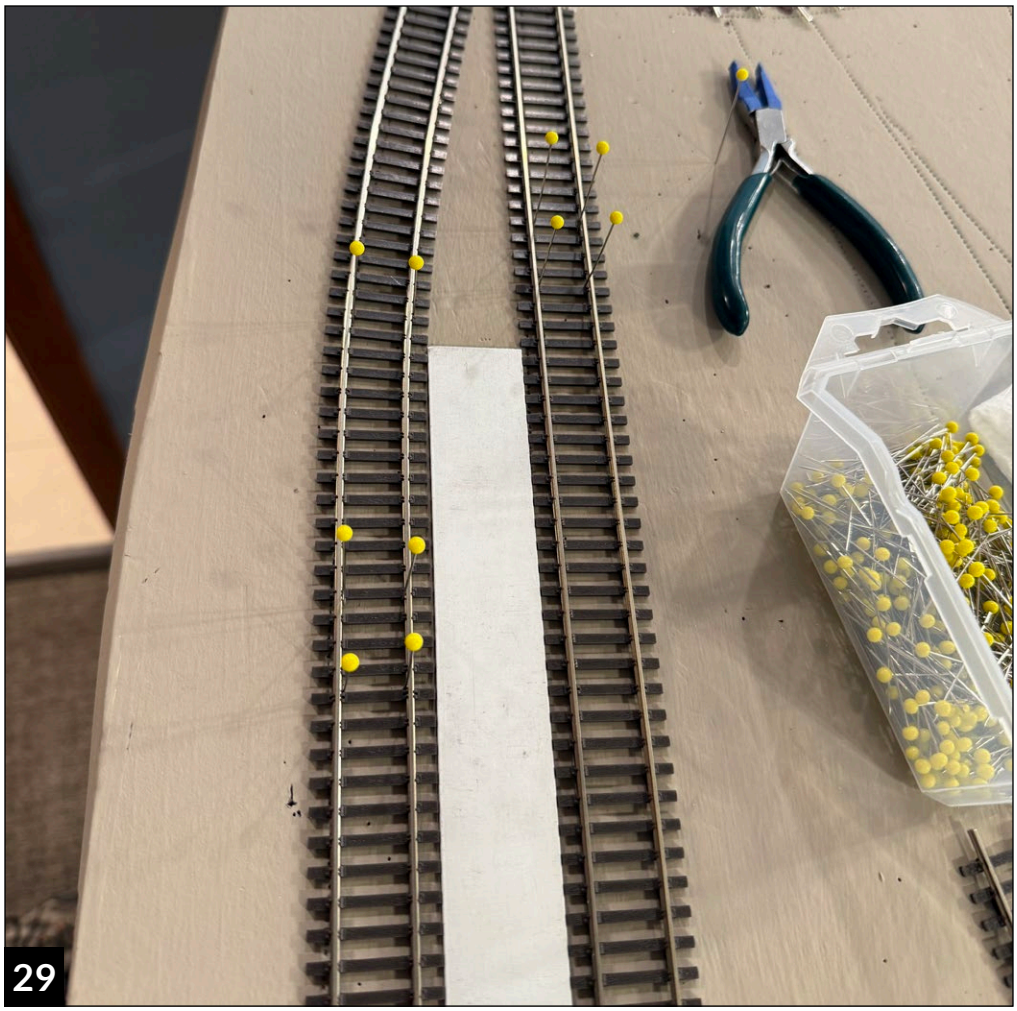
28

A properly soldered rail joint should not have excess solder, should have a bright, shiny surface on the solder, and should not have melted ties. Melted ties are usually caused by soldering at too cool a temperature or by not having a bright, clean, tinned soldering tip. This joint was soldered at 700°F using a sharp conical soldering tip similar to a pencil point. In this image you can also see track spike heads in the ties on each side of the solder joint. This is a Walthers code 83 turnout joined to Walthers code 83 flex track. The spikes are ¼" Micro Engineering and they have been put through the pre-drilled spike holes in the Walthers track.

Laying Straight and Parallel Track

Use a straight edge to keep track straight where it needs to be until it has been glued or spiked. If two straight sections are to be laid parallel, it works well to use a straight edge between them that is the same width as the desired tie separation.

On the F&N, parallel curves are formed in the AnyRail Track Plan and copied to the layout with the punch wheel technique described previously. The results can be seen in **(27)**. If you are not using a full-size track plan, there are commercially available model railroad products that will aid in keeping various radii parallel. An example is the Bachmann Adjustable Track Tool. You can also use a beam compass if you have enough space for it to swing in the desired radius.

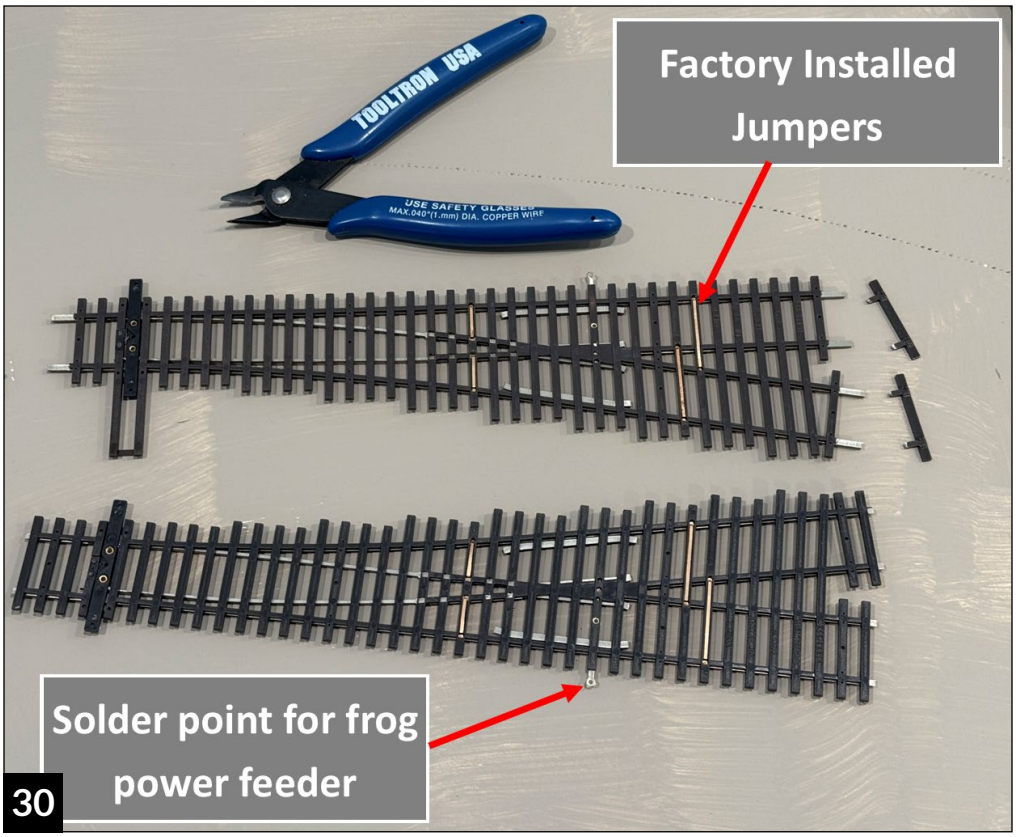


In this image, the two yard tracks need to be parallel, and the metal straight edge is the perfect width to separate their ties and keep them straight. Notice that the end of the metal straight edge is positioned so that it becomes the pivot point for the left track creating the curve naturally.

Turnouts

Turnouts are one of the more complex areas of trackwork with their moving point rails and diverging tracks. They deserve careful attention to ensure smooth operations. But before you can lay down any turnouts, you need to choose a brand. Some features to consider are:

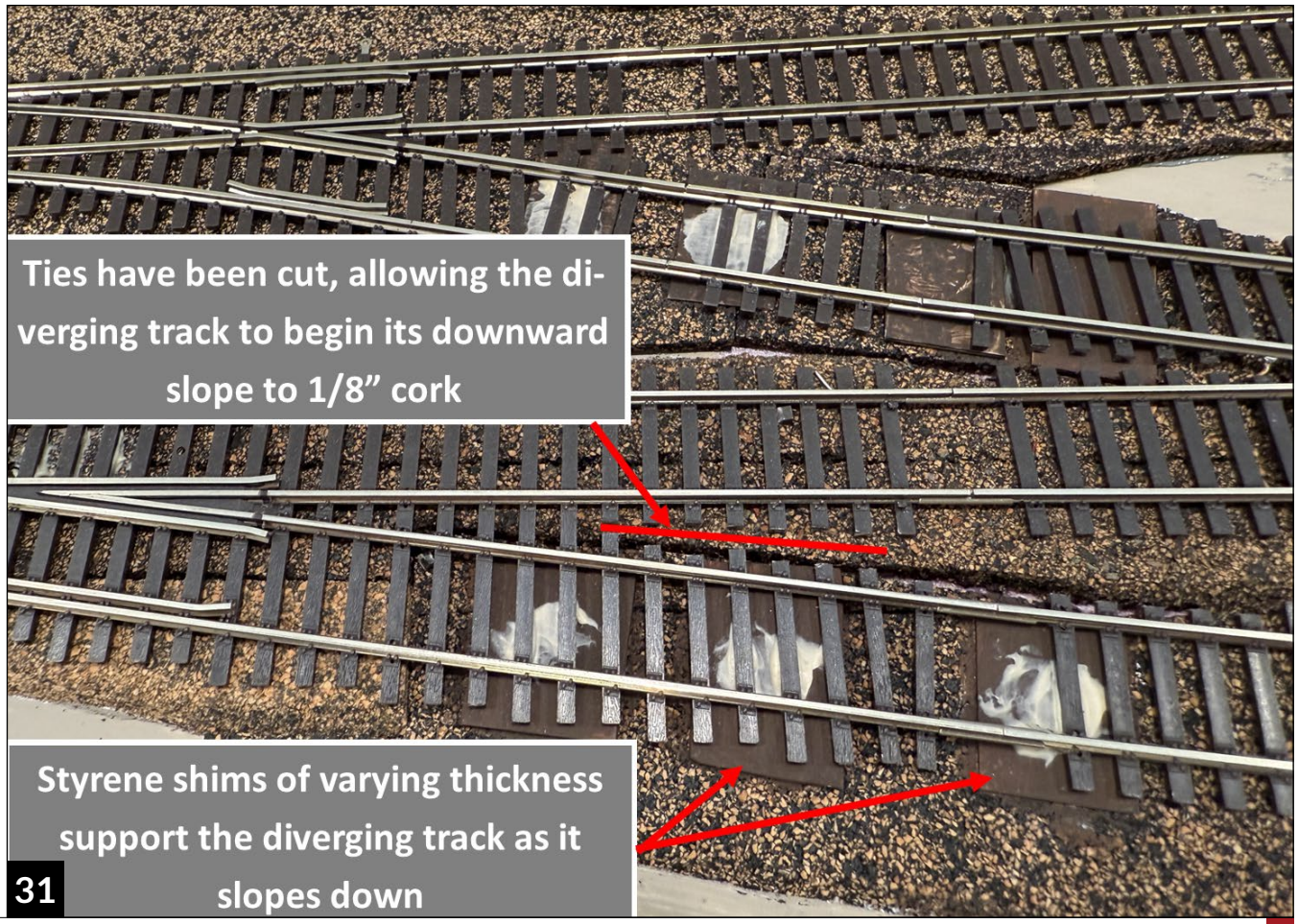
1. Solid or hinged point rails – solid point rails are preferred on the F&N
2. DCC friendly with insulated frog, plus an easy way to connect power to the frog
3. Sprung point rails – many of the better turnouts now come with sprung points, but if you will be using Caboose series "S" ground throws or powered switches then you'll probably be removing the point springs. If so, it doesn't matter. If you want to throw turnouts with your finger, then sprung points are great. Some turnouts, such as PECO, allow for the spring to be replaced from above so the turnout can be glued down and still have the spring replaced. Others, like Walthers, require you to replace the spring from the bottom - a problem if the turnout is glued down.
4. The length of the frog should be considered – especially with #6 or greater turnouts. If frogs are not powered, they can cause stalls on short engines without keep alives, and this problem is worse with long frogs.
5. The 4 gaps isolating the frog should be perfectly smooth. Some recently purchased turnouts for the F&N have had high spots in the plastic filler for these insulating gaps.
6. Realism of the turnout should be considered. Today it's possible to buy turnouts that look very realistic, while many older designs may look more toy-like.
7. Matching turnout brand to the brand of flex track is worth considering. Even though the code of the track should indicate the same rail height across brands, the height of ties can vary as well as the profile of the rail cross section. That said, most major brands are reasonably interchangeable within the same rail code.



30

These are the underside of Walthers #5 turnouts. Note the DCC friendly design incorporates an insulated frog in the middle and jumpers on the left to power the points while jumpers on the right power rails beyond the frog. You can also see the small frog power solder point. This is a nice feature if you power your frogs. The top turnout has had one tie on each end removed to allow rail joiners to be added.

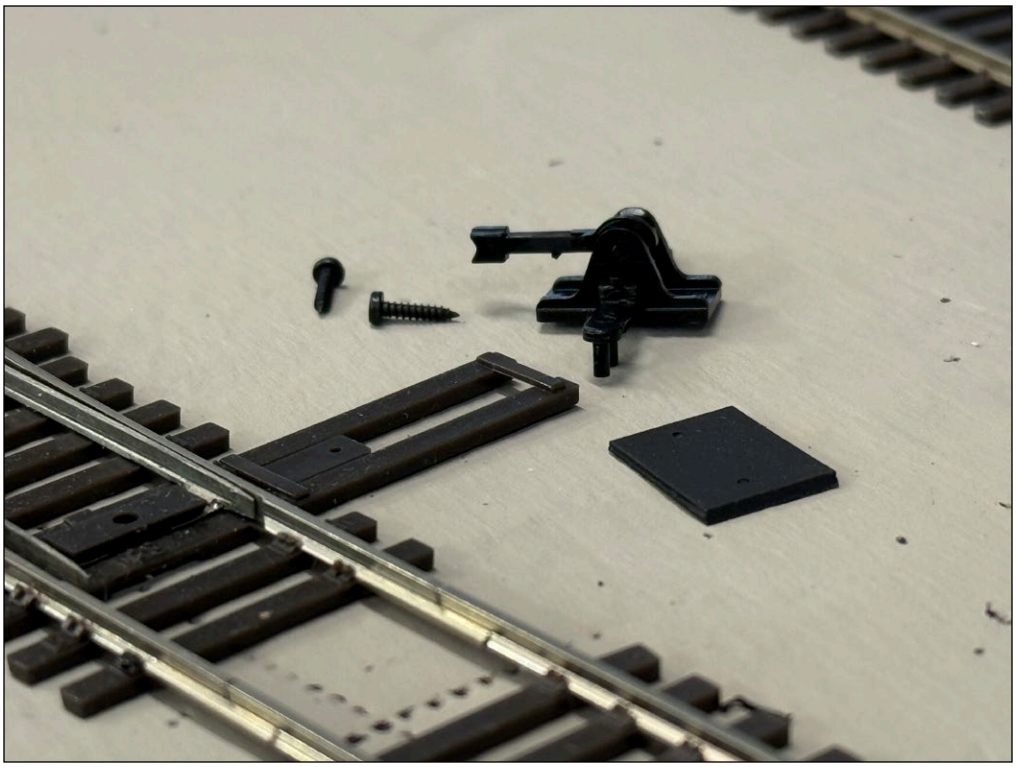
You may find it necessary to modify turnouts in various ways. There's no problem with this if you don't compromise the geometry or point/frog area of the turnout. Here, both turnouts have the diverging track sloping down to 1/8" cork from ¼" cork. To start this incline closer to the frog on the long #8 turnout (bottom turnout), it was necessary to cut some of the ties between the through track and diverging track. In this case, it's important to remember the jumpers under the ties. If you need to cut ties with a jumper, you simply need to solder new jumpers.


Ties have been cut, allowing the diverging track to begin its downward slope to 1/8" cork
Styrene shims of varying thickness support the diverging track as it slopes down

31

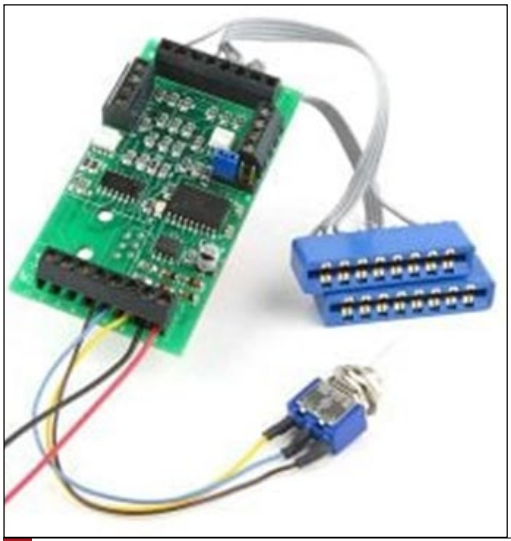
Now that we've laid track, it's time to get the turnouts under control. In the next Getting Started, we'll add multiple types of switches to control the turnouts including manual, powered and multiple control points. We'll control Tortoise machines with momentary contact push button switches and we'll touch on DCC control of turnouts. Not forgetting the frogs, there will be frog juicers and Caboose ground throws with contacts for frogs. See you again in the next *Marker Lamp*! **ML**

If you have comments, questions, or suggestions about this column, please email me here: *gettingstarted@centexnmra.org*



Caboose Industries ground throw

Tortoise switch machines, mounted



DCC Specialties Wabbit accessory decoder for 2 Tortoise switch machines

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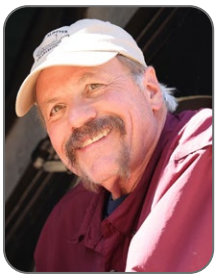
Historian's Corner



Central Texas LSR Conventions

by Bob Barnett, MMR
LSR Historian

Early LSR Conventions in Waco

In the early days of the Lone Star Region, conventions held in Central Texas were hosted in Waco. In fact, two of the first five Lone Star Region Annual Conventions were held in Waco in 1952 and 1955.

Very little information on these conventions is available but a Timetable from the 1964 LSR Convention survives in the LSR archives. The timetable cover **(1)** features an aerial view of downtown Waco complete with the ALICO building and the Raleigh Hotel.

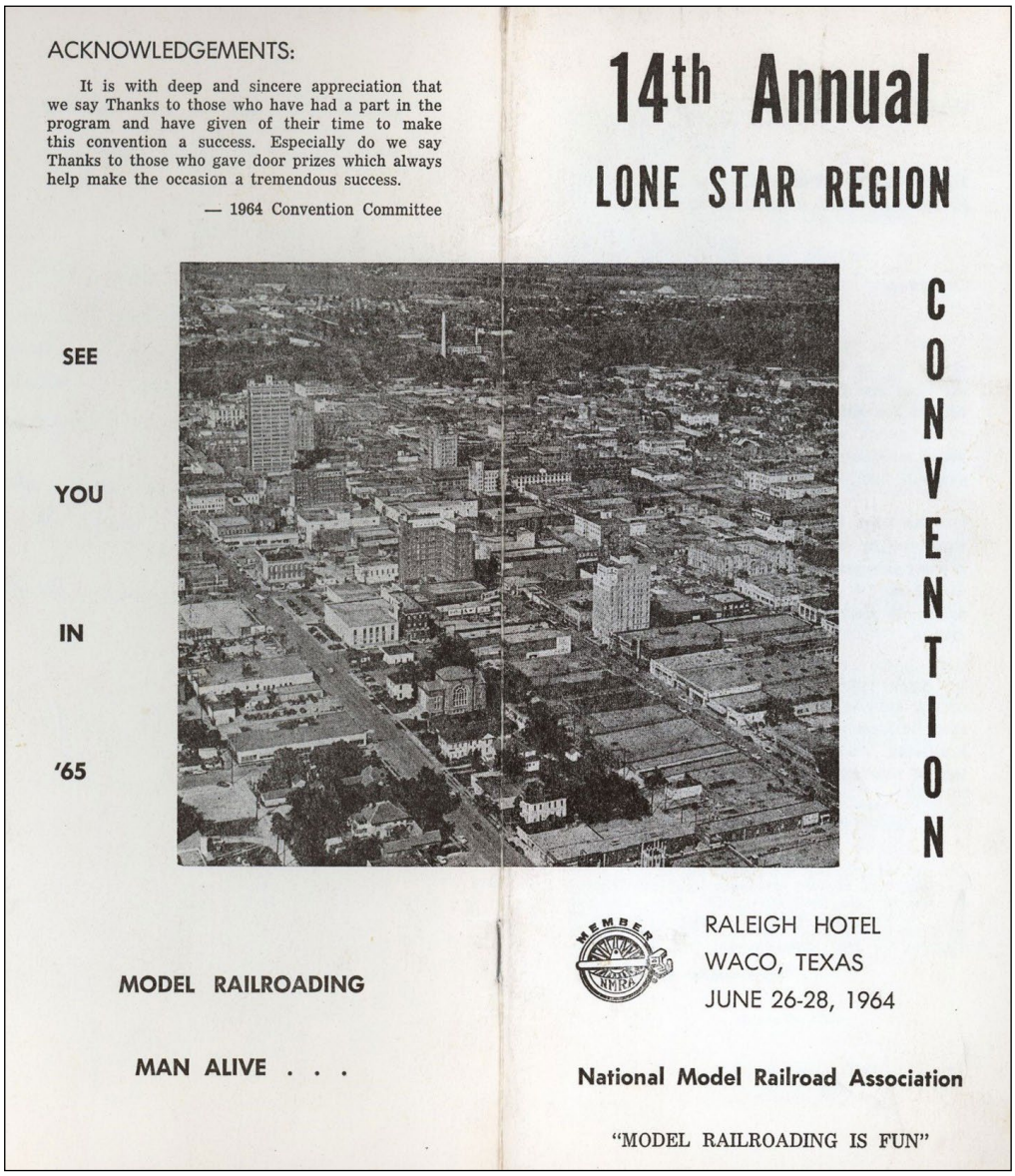
The ALICO (Amicable Life Insurance Company) Building, when erected in 1910, was at 22 stories the tallest building in Texas and the tallest building west of the Mississippi and south of the Mason Dixon Line. It remained the tallest building between Downtown Dallas and Houston for many years.

Waco was a central Texas rail center boasting the large Katy Yard and Warden Shops just across the Brazos River in the city of Bellmead and a large Cotton Belt yard adjacent to them.

In addition the city was served by the International–Great Northern (AKA Missouri Pacific) and the Southern Pacific. A few colored images exist of the elaborate railroad-hosted yard tours likely taken by the late Earl Holloway of Waco. Some of these images have appeared in the Katy color books by Raymond George and Steve Goen. They include shots of the Katy gondolas with temporary seats installed pulled by an SW switcher across the Brazos River bridge and into the Katy Bellmead Yard. There, diesel Freight and Passenger units were lined up for inspection and photos.

Similar LSR tours were hosted by the Southern Pacific and Missouri Pacific in 1953 in Houston and later by the Texas & Pacific in Fort Worth. Such tours would be close to impossible to arrange today.

To the best of the author's knowledge all of the layouts shown on the 1964 LSR layout tour are gone today, but Waco remains an interesting place to visit with Texas


ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:
It is with deep and sincere appreciation that we say Thanks to those who have had a part in the program and have given of their time to make this convention a success. Especially do we say Thanks to those who gave door prizes which always help make the occasion a tremendous success.
— 1964 Convention Committee
14th Annual
LONE STAR REGION
CONVENTION
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The Timetable Cover from the 1964 LSR Convention in Waco - note the ALICO Building in the rear of the photo

Ranger Museum, the Dr. Pepper Museum and the famous suspension bridge across the Brazos.

The First Austin LSR Convention

The first LSR Convention to be held in Austin (Including the surrounding Austin area) was held in 1988. The Convention site was the Austin South Plaza Hotel on I-35 South near Woodward Street -- the same location (now a different hotel) where the 2026 LSR Convention will be held! Well-known model railroader Chuck Ellis assembled a small team of local NMRA members to help him put on the convention.

LSR Conventions in those days were typically three-day affairs beginning around noon on Friday and concluding after the LSR Breakfast on Sunday morning.

Chuck organized an additional outside activity (literally) he called the Watermelon Thump. Chuck was a brass player in a group call the Austin Symphonic Band as I recall. The group gave concerts on Friday evenings at Zilker Park in Austin. So, by adding a picnic Chuck produced the Watermelon Thump.

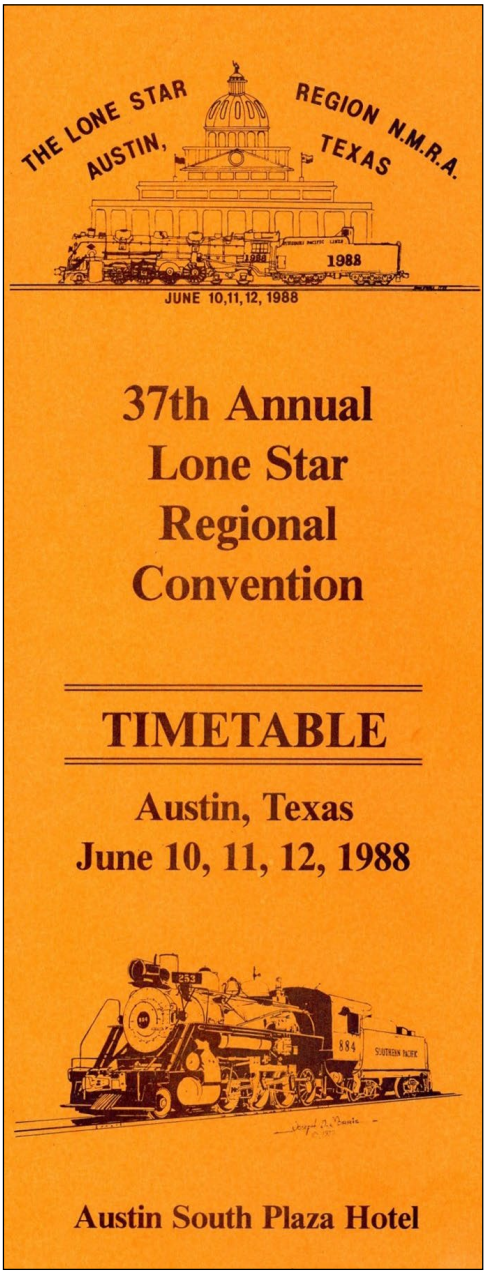
Chuck and his Co-chairman Steve Rowe put on the 1988 Convention with and extremely small staff. With Chuck Ellis as chair and Steve Rowe as co-chair, Steve also handled the contest co-ordination, Tom Pearson handled the clinics and Bob Barnett and David McBride coordinated the layout tour.

Local modeler, artist and now a famous author, Joe Dale Morris produced and excellent pen and ink drawing of a Missouri Pacific 2-8-4 appropriately numbered No 1988. The drawing also featured the Texas Capital in the background and was used in advertising and on the cover of the printed timetable. As an added feature Chuck produced a silk screen of the locomotive drawing and the committee listed above met at my house in north Austin to silk screen print a couple of hundred pizza boxes to be used for the "goodie bags" for the convention handouts. I still have one of these left that contains miscellaneous building materials for use on structures. Note that cardboard pizza boxes do yellow a bit after 40 years.

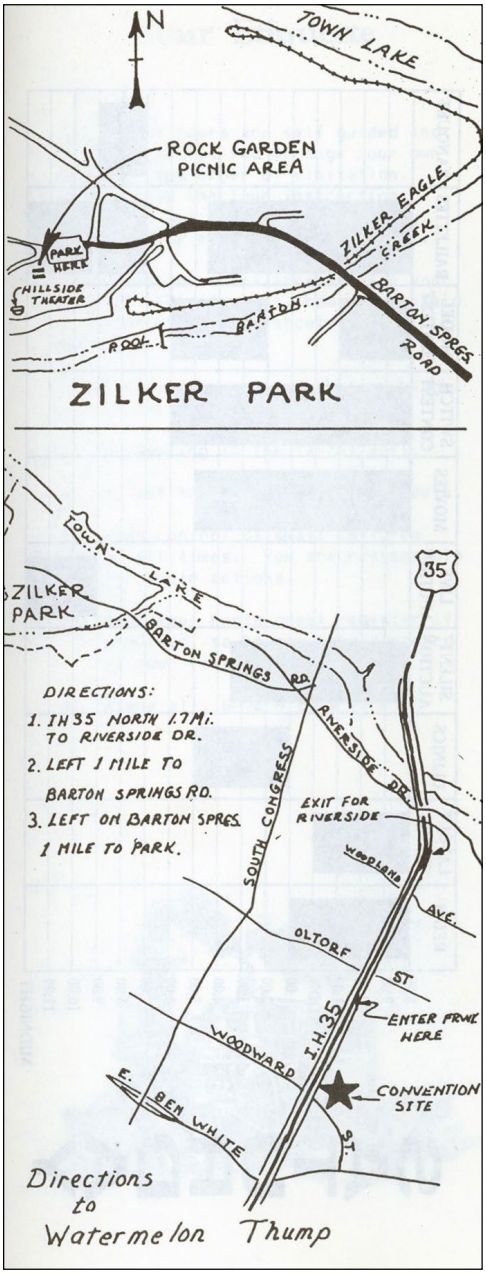
The layout tours only included seven layouts. The tour included David Barrow's famous Cat Mountain and Santa Fe, the post-steam, pre-dominos version, and Chuck Ellis' Great Northern scenic masterpiece.

A hand drawn map **(4)** along with written directions guided guests to the layouts as there were no navigation aids available for yet-to-be created cell phones. The author drafted the layout map and the attached map to the Watermelon Thump.

To add a bit of railroad flavor to the map I added the distance to the next large cities. A quick review of these notes:



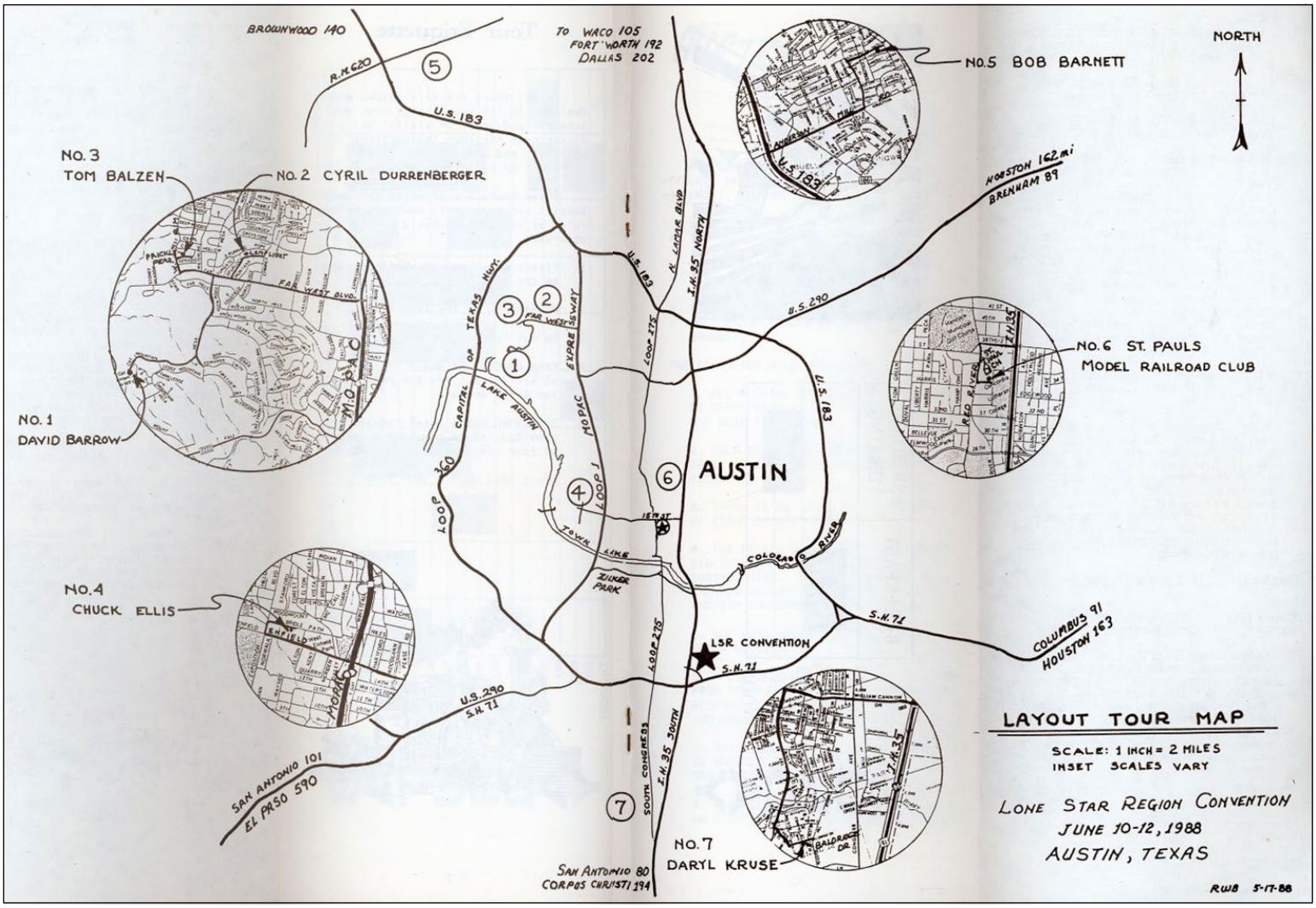
Timetable cover from the 1988 LSR Convention in Austin featuring pen and ink drawings by Joe Dale Morris



Hand-drawn map and directions to the "Watermelon Thump" in Zilker Park

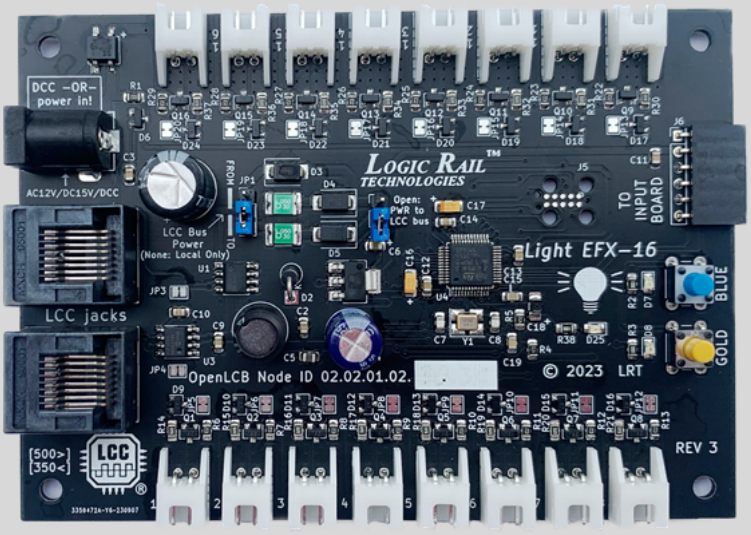
- Dallas-202 miles
- Fort Worth-92 miles
- Waco-105 miles
- Houston-163 miles
- San Antonio-80 miles
- Corpus Christi-194 miles

...proving the Austin-Round Rock-Temple area is the ideal spot to hold an LSR Convention. It is accessible to most members of the LSR. So, no complaining about the drive to the 2026 LSR Convention in Austin. We'll see you there!! **ML**



Hand-drawn map of the 1988 LSR Convention layout tour

Light EFX-16



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Director and Department Reports

Treasurer

by Steve Sandifer, MMR
steve.sandifer@sbcglobal.net

It has been a quiet fall. All loans for the Blues Express have been repaid and the LSR received $1430.46 in income from the convention. Well done Rod and company.

The only other activity has been the receipt of $774.00 from the NMRA of which $387.00 was forwarded to divisions.

As of October 31, 2025, we have $11,035.33 in checking and $46,700.25 in CDs. Some of those CDs will mature this month so I will take a little out to up our checking account. One check for $37.50 has not cleared yet.

Cowcatcher Division 1

by Dick Brannan
director@cowcatcherdivision.org

The Cowcatcher Division has had a very strong fall. Our meeting attendance is averaging about 43 members in person and another 3-7 attending via Zoom.

We are experiencing enthusiastic participation of our members in meetings; as an example, 4-7 people will ask for help with a particular issue they are experiencing on their layout. Another example of that participation is our "Show and Tell" section where members explain how they built models. Two examples are shown below.

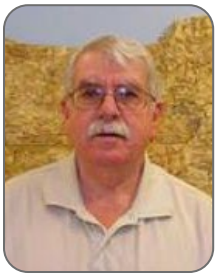
Darrell Cowles led a team consisting of Harold Berenzweig and David Steckler to develop novel ways to promote and grow the hobby at non -traditional venues. As a result of their tireless efforts the Division

purchased a custom "pop-up canopy" with graphics showing how "Model Railroading is fun" to be used as a recruitment tool at festivals in the Fort Worth area. In addition, we are building a display case housing a railroad themed diorama. This will be displayed at libraries in the area with a QR code directing the observer to the Cowcatcher Division website and to a page tailored to people new to the hobby.

The Plano Train Show was very successful for the Division. Jim Archer and his team refurbished a "Pay it Forward" module and it generated a lot of interest at the show and was raffled off to a family living in Euless. In addition, the Division created a new attraction for the booth, directed entirely to children. Developed by Deb and Russell Gifford, the Junior Engineer Academy put a throttle in a child's hand so they could run a train on a small layout and experience the joy of operating. The Division handed out over 200 Engineer hats and stickers to the children who operated.

Dick Brannan
Director - Cowcatcher Division

Bayou Division 2



by Rod Fredericks
fredericks.rod@gmail.com

No report received.

Trinity River Division 3

by Jeff Rykel
jeff_rykiel@yahoo.com

Greetings from Division 3. As we entered the Holiday season, we also enter a busy time for our Division, and for the north Texas area in general. We are currently gearing up for the Plano Train show in January and have started plans for the LSR Convention headed to North Texas in June of 2027.

Our focus now, coming into the end of this year, is to reflect on our accomplishments, the growth and development of our newer members, and a heartfelt appreciation of those seasoned veterans, in the mentorship programs. We continue to have lively discussions about the latest innovations, some more lively than others, which inspire and facilitate those making progress on their own projects. As we move into December, in a time of joyful remembrance, many of us focus back on the simpler times of the train around the tree. Where a time of innocence coupled with imagination, led us to what our hobby has become, and what it has yet to produce.

While technology and innovation continue to excel, we find our that our imagination, is too, excelling and leading us just as it did with the 5-year-old under the tree. It is a special time for many of us during this holiday season.

We've put together a clinic structure over the past few months and find that our more interactive, make-and-take clinics are very popular with our base. My focus is to bring more interactive clinic structures in the future that can focus on newer practices, newer technologies, and even newer non-traditional ideas.

Our show and tell sessions yield many innovative models and ideas that would have been a pipe dream not so long ago. We have seen a great interest in 3D modeling, 3D printing, computer interface, etc… as some of the highlights. However, newer ways to build in the areas of fundamental construction, typical assembly, and classical design, have sparked interest on those researching and developing, bringing these to the forefront. One idea is a series of projects from start to finish, focusing on many areas. More to come in the near months, stop in and look in on our progress, and say hello.

Allow me, and all the members of Division 3, to extend our best wishes during the Holidays, to include a very joyful and prosperous new year. We look forward to 2026 with the "HighBall".

Cen-Tex Division 4

by Doug Taylor
director@centexnmra.org

Greetings from Division 4!

As ol' 2025 is pulling into it's final station, we are climbing aboard the 2026 streamliner heading out.

We are making great progress on the 2026 LSR Convention. We have already scheduled some interesting tours, have quite a few clinics set up, a large number of layouts on offer and plenty of operations to be had. All this in addition to a great keynote speaker and some special guests coming in. You are not going to want to miss this convention as we try to make it something special for our nation's

250th birthday, so come Connect with us! Early Bird registration is OPEN, so go and get signed up at connections2026.com and stay up-to-date by bookmarking the site in your browser.

Keep in mind that the Regional Convention is a benefit for the entire Region and we still have room for more volunteers. As an added bonus, you can earn AP credit for volunteering. Great things can happen when dedicated people put their minds to the task.

We have had a number of members present clinics at our meetings to share their knowledge with the Division, as well as quite a few showing their amazing layouts during layout tours. At our meetings we also have time set aside for members to bring in projects they are working on to show the membership. There have been some excellent models shown and the Q&A after each is presented is informative to all.

And from our Division to you and your families, I'd like to wish everyone a safe and Happy Holiday season. Can't wait to see more of each of you in the coming year. The next meeting for the division will be January 10th at the Austin NW Rec center. The meeting will start at 10:00 and as always it will be broadcast live on Zoom. -Doug

West Texas Division 5

by Brooks Willig
headroadie2004@gmail.com

Greetings fellow model railroaders!

A few months ago, my wife and I decided to move to lower Alabama. We visited this area back in July for a business conference and have felt a draw from the Lord to relocate there. We have been very busy getting ready for this transition. We sold our house the first week of October, and just closed on the sale of our audio video production business mid November.

It has been a pleasure to lead the division and host monthly meetings on Zoom. We have had many interesting clinics on a wide variety of topics on each meeting.

In May of 2025, I switched to a new format to encourage participation and provide a broader subject matter presented at each meeting. The overall acceptance and participation has been positive towards this new meeting structure. I have recorded each meeting with the intent to post them on the Division 5 YouTube channel. I will be working on editing and uploading the meetings that have not been uploaded yet now that I have a not as full schedule.

I have been sending out requests to the division members for someone to take over as Director for Division 5, but I have yet to have someone come forward to do so. I will continue to ask as much as I can to find someone to take over, I plan to assist in transferring all the division's digital and financial assets to the next director.

It's been a pleasure serving Division 5, Happy Rails.

The email list will remain active. Please make sure you are signed up and receiving these emails to keep up with meeting announcements, reminders for future meetings, and other division updates.

Sign up at the following link: http://eepurl.com/hRLLm9

Brooks Willig
Division 5 Director

South Texas Division 6

by Roy Kaiser
fr8train@gvtc.com

Hello to everyone from South Texas!

We continue to have great turnouts at our bi-monthly Division 6 meetings. We are averaging more than 30 people per meeting. Each meeting has been complete with a clinic by a local model railroader and each meeting has included a home layout tour afterward.

Of special focus for the past few months has been the development of a new division logo. We made our decision at the October meeting and are very pleased to display the winning choice above. We feel it accomplishes all the requirements to fit our area, with the Texas flag background and the Southern Pacific color scheme while proudly including our NMRA and LSR heritage.

Our current membership stands at 72 which is the result of 5 members withdrawing and 4 new members joining in the past 3 months. We have embarked on a path to try and find why members leave the NMRA. Is it a lack of interest, a lack of financial ability or is there something we could have done differently to sway their decision.

In closing, I would like to once again express my sincere gratitude for the continue support of our sponsors Discount Model Trains, Papa Ben's Train Place, Prototype N Scale Models, Maverick Metalwork and the Longhorn Café. Thank you all.

Roy Kaiser

North Louisiana Division 7

by Don P. Kimmell
elf4kcs@me.com

No report received.

Texas Gulf Division 8

by Phil Stewart
pstewart1225@yahoo.com

No report received.

At-Large Director

by Deborah Gifford
817-805-7067
gifforddeborah5@gmail.com

No report received.

At-Large Director

by Michael Harang
miharang@gmail.com

Hello fellow LSR members,

For the first time in a very long time, I had the opportunity to attend a LSR Division 3 monthly meeting on Saturday 18 October 2025. Orchestrated by Div. 3 Director Jeff Rykiel, the meeting covered topics such as 2027 LSR Convention planning and participation in upcoming local train shows. Also covered was national news including TrainFest 2025 taking place in Milwaukee during early November 2025, and the 2026 Scenic Express NMRA National Convention in Chattanooga, Tennessee 27 July through 02 August.

Of the regular monthly meeting topics, we watched the "Show and Tell" where we were shown progress on a slash burner on the former Westside Lumber Company that is utilizing 3D printing to aide in the construction efforts, and a very basic and inexpensive "Time Saver" switching module to get young and old involved in the hobby.

Duane Richardson, MMR and the LSR AP Chairman, continued with the 3rd installment on a Freight House "Make and Take" project that several members are working on.

It was a great time for me to visit with several friends and an opportunity to meet several new ones. I would encourage everyone in the LSR to attend your Division's monthly meetings as there is nothing better than being involved and spending time with like minded persons in the hobby. And if the opportunity affords itself - attend some other Division's meetings - many of which offer remote participation via Zoom - you might just learn a few new things, or meet some folks that you normally would not see very often.

I have found that being involved in an organization (whether model railroading or some other hobby) offers many benefits that some overlook or are unaware of. These include social interaction with like minded people, exchange of ideas, and one that I find particularly intriguing: motivation. I don't know about you, but for myself, after a meeting or a convention, I feel a definite boost in my motivational level that helps to carry me through to the next meeting. If asked to help with a division or region task, small or large, offer your services - the rewards are almost always greater

than the work requested. Most of us can use a hand up every now and then - get involved, participate and take advantage of your LSR and its members to help take your modeling hobby to the next level.

At-Large Director

by Don Winn, MMR
donswinn@gmail.com

Registration for the 2026 LSR Convention is now open! My friends in Austin are sure to put on another excellent convention. Please put that on your calendars.

Save the Date! Next year's NMRA national convention will be held in Chattanooga, Tennessee, the headquarters city for the NMRA. It will be held July 27-August 2, 2026. Early bird registration in now open, and the host hotel is also open for reservations. I'm signed up, and I hope to see you there!

Much farther out in the calendar is the 2028 LSR regional convention, which is planned to be in San Antonio. A planning committee has already started meeting. Finding affordable venues in the greater San Antonio area is proving to be a challenge. If anyone knows of a place that could fit our event, please let me know.

Thanks!
Don Winn

Achievement Program

by Duane Richardson, MMR
pinecreekstation@verizon.net

No report received.

Contests

by Ray Byer and Jeff Palmer, MMR
raybyer@yahoo.com
res06wqv@gte.net

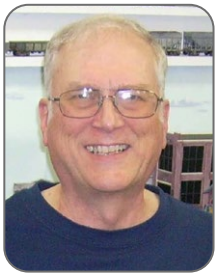
No report received (but see the sidebar earlier in this issue about the 2026 convention contest).

Conventions

by Joe Leising
joe@leising.com

No report received.

Education



by Robert Mangrum, MMR
1txsouthrr@gmail.com

Upon assuming the chair of education reporting for the LSR at the annual convention at Baton Rouge, I immediately contacted all the division chairs. Several of the divisions are not fully in operation at this time, so the

report, although it can be considered as covering the entire region, does have some unreported divisions.

For the calendar year 2025 the LSR had a total of 74 educational presentations and 26 "make and take" programs during the calendar year. These occurred in divisions 1, 3, 4, and 8. Other divisions either did not report or had very inconclusive data from which to draw the necessary information.

In addition, the annual convention at Baton Rouge had 26 presentations and 3 make-and-take activities. The Greater Houston Train show had 6 presentations while the two Plano Train shows had 6 as well.

Reporting the data by division 1 had 10 presentations and 2 make and takes, and 3 presentations at Plano; division 3 had 8 presentations, 3 make and takes and 3 presentations at Plano; division 4 had 7 presentations; while division 8/SAN JAC had 11 presentations and 6 presentations at the Houston train show.

Respectfully submitted,
Robert G. (Bob) Mangrum MMR 456

Membership

by Jared Roberts
940-765-1836
jlroberts0418@gmail.com

Sadly, we've had one member pass away since the last issue, and no rerails.

Youth

by Don Winn, MMR
donswinn@gmail.com

I've been working with the division directors to get their nominations for our annual Youth Awards, but I will also welcome nominations from any LSR member. Please send me your suggestions **soon, soon, soon** so that we can recognize up and coming model train enthusiasts for this year. Thank you!
Don

Membership Report

	2024			2025									
Division	**Oct**	**Nov**	**Dec**	**Jan**	**Feb**	**Mar**	**Apr**	**May**	**Jun**	**Jul**	**Aug**	**Sep**	**Oct**
One	167	172	166	171	166	167	164	160	158	157	154	151	150
Two	83	84	84	81	81	81	82	84	83	84	83	84	83
Three	167	166	166	171	173	171	168	166	169	167	168	166	163
Four	131	128	124	129	128	126	126	129	130	130	131	129	129
Five	29	28	27	28	30	28	27	28	27	28	28	26	27
Six	72	76	77	75	77	74	74	73	74	74	72	73	73
Seven	21	21	21	22	23	22	22	23	23	23	23	23	23
Eight	198	195	192	194	194	193	197	196	195	189	190	191	189
LSR Total	**868**	**870**	**857**	**871**	**872**	**862**	**860**	**859**	**859**	**852**	**849**	**843**	**837**

GREATER HOUSTON TRAIN SHOW

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2026 10:00 – 4:00

Pasadena Convention Center

7902 Fairmont Parkway, Pasadena, TX 77504
East of Beltway 8 on Fairmont Parkway

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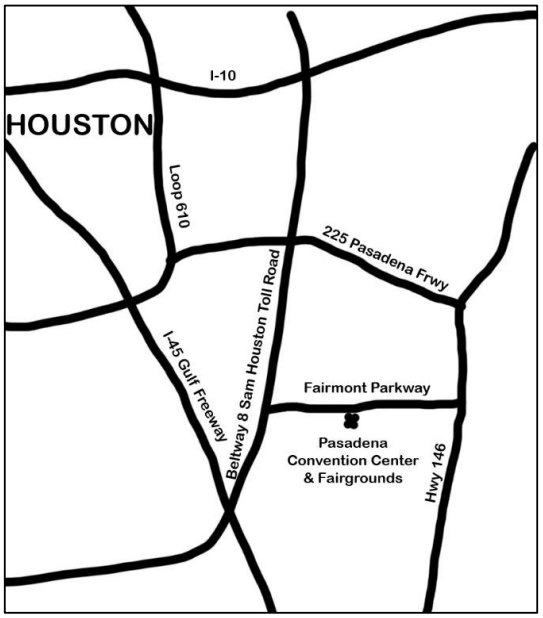
Chairman: Steve Sandifer; steve.sandifer@sbcglobal.net
Table Sales: Robert Ashcraft: crash8473@comcast.net

http://sanjacmodeltrains.org



Check out the
NEW
LSR website!

https://lsrnmra.org

Lots more will be coming soon!

We're looking for more GREAT LSR model railroads for the front page!

GET OUT THE WORD!

Color

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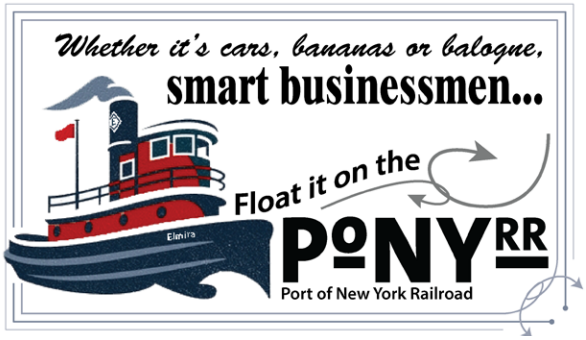
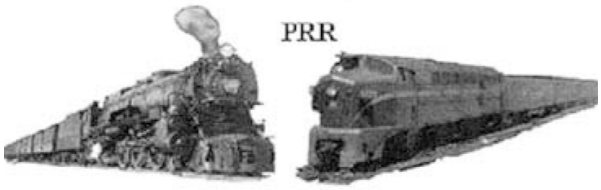


Riley Triggs | ponyrr.blogspot.com

THE ALLEGHENY RAILROAD
HORSESHOE CURVE
ALTOONA



Jerry Schoenberg
Carrollton, Texas (972) 242-9053
arrjerry@aol.com

Pennsylvania Railroad
Laurel Valley Secondary

Pittsburgh Division Circa 1957
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Southwestern Pennsylvania in Texas O Scale

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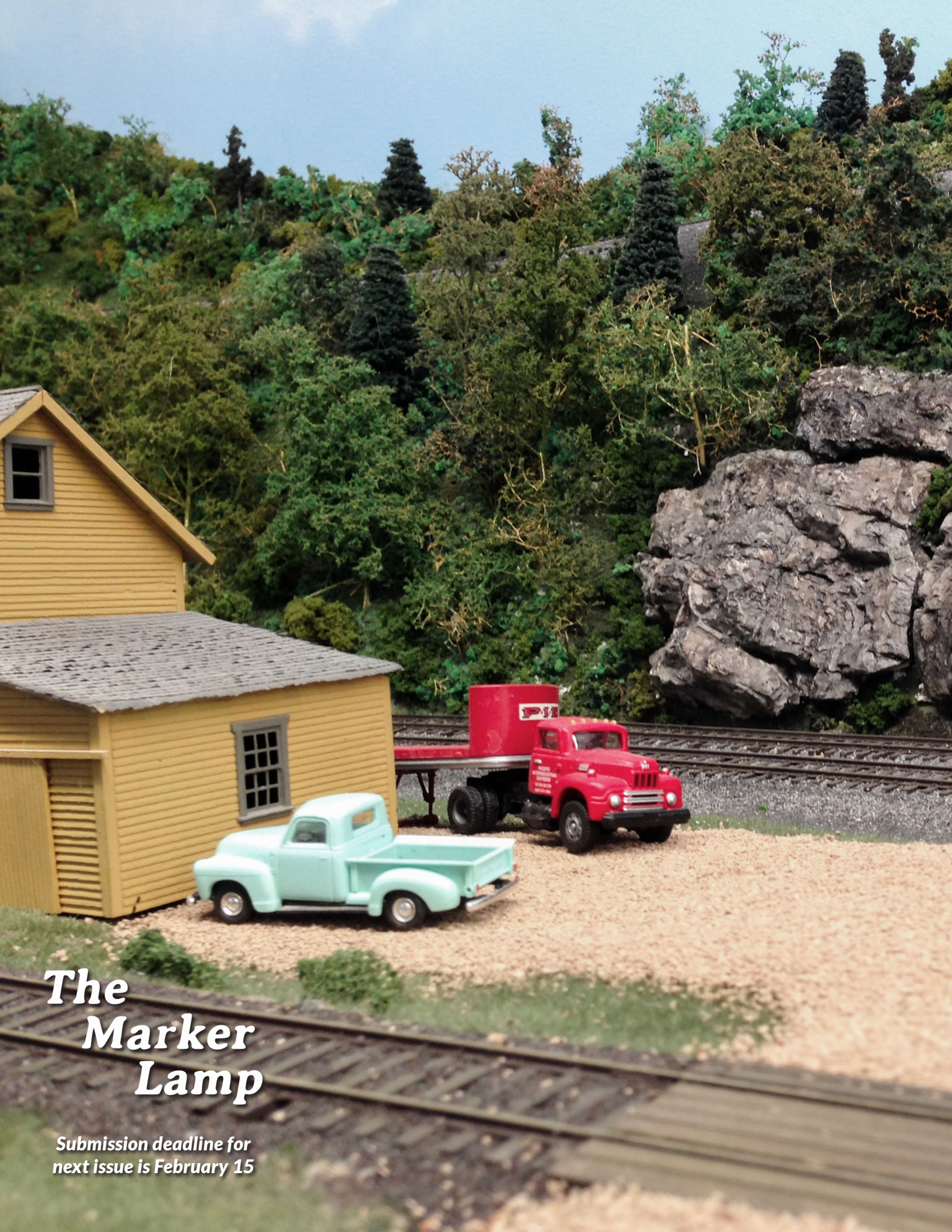

The Marker Lamp

Submission deadline for next issue is February 15